Annual
Subscription
in North America
$45

BELARUSIAN REVIEW

Quarterly Information Bulletin (ISSN 1064-7716)
Published by Belarusan-American Association, Inc.
a fraternal nonprofit association
Managing Editor: P.O. Box 10353, Torrance, CA 90505 USA
TelFax: (310) 373-0793; E-mail: BelReview@aol.com
http://members.aol.com/belreview/index.html

Vol. 13, No. 1 Spring 2001



Boundaries shown on this map are those of the Republic of Belarus, and do not include the entire Belarusian ethnic territory parts of which extend into neighboring states.

EDITOR'S DESK

Congratulations, President Bush!

After long and arduous election campaign, the United States elected George W. Bush to be its 43rd president. The new president was inaugurated on January 20. He chose General Colin Powell to be his Secretary of State and Dr. Condoleezza Rice his National Security Council Advisor. These two people will be in power to determine the direction of future relations of this country with Belarus.

As a rule, the new administration needs time to get its feet on the ground, especially when taking over from the administration of the competing political party. What we know is that Secretary Colin Powell wrote a letter to the Belarus foreign minister, and Deputy State Secretary Richard Armitage wrote BR that under the new administration U.S. policy toward Belarus has not changed (see LETTERS). Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jon Purnell and Greg Perett, State Department's head of the Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus Office, visited Miensk on March 19-20. They met with government officials, representatives of democratic political organizations, NGOs, the independent press, businessmen, educators, wives of the disappeared and political prisoners, and representatives of the Belarusian cultural elite.

Before his departure home, Mr. Purnell stated at a Miensk press conference that US Ambassador Kozak recently told President Lukashenka that President Bush and his administration are ready to work for better bilateral relations with Belarus. Mr. Purnell further said: " To achieve that goal the government of Belarus must take a number of concrete steps to bring it back into compliance with the commitments each of the members of the Euro-Atlantic community has made concerning the civic and political rights of its citizens." He also noted that Secretary of State Powell wrote recently to Foreign Minister Khvostov, where he said: "These commitments, freely made by all participating states, are fundamental to ensuring the freedom and prosperity of all European peoples." (See FEATURES for detail.)

We took the liberty to inform the incoming administration about the current situation in Belarus by writing letters to President Bush, General Powell and Dr. Condoleezza Rice. Here is the text of the February 1 letter to President Bush:

> On behalf of *Belarusian Review* and its readers, we would like to congratulate you on your election to the office of President of the United States. We wish you success in carrying out your duties and responsibilities to the people of the United States.
>
> The *Belarusian Review* is a US-based, English-language quarterly which, for 12 years, has been covering political, economic, societal and cultural developments in Belarus, one of the former Soviet republics that gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.
>
> Unfortunately, after enjoying three years of democratic reforms, the country fell victim to a wily dictator, President Aleksandr Lukashenka, who, through a fraudulent referendum, changed the country's democratic constitution, dissolved the parliament, extended his term in office by additional two years, restored the Soviet style form of government, and pursued the policy of handing Belarus over to Russia. His government has suppressed the native culture, freedom of the press and civil liberties, and persecuted the opposition.

The U.S. and other Western democracies consider Mr. Lukashenka an illegitimate head of state since the time his term in office legally expired in 1999. The new parliament, elected last year in full disregard of international standards for free and fair elections, is also viewed as illegal. In a display of his animosity toward the United States, Mr. Lukashenka has refused to receive the new U.S. Ambassador to Belarus, Mr. Michael Kozak, who has been waiting since October to present his credentials.

We deeply care that Belarus become a democratic country and retain its sovereignty, independence and the territorial integrity. One specific issue that concerns us at this time is the move afoot on the part of Lukashenka and the Russian government to incorporate Belarus into the Russian Federation.

Belarus is scheduled to hold presidential elections next September. Mr. Lukashenka announced that he will run for the office. He already has taken a number of actions to secure his election.

We have been heartened by your inauguration remarks where you stressed that "America remains engaged in the world" and will go on "shaping a balance of power." The U.S. and its European allies have been quite successful in getting rid of Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia last year. Now the time has come for Lukashenka, Europe's last and only tyrant, to go. It is Russia who keeps Mr. Lukashenka in power by providing political support and propping up Belarus' economy with energy and other forms of aid.

It is ironic that Western aid to keep Russia afloat makes it much easier for Russia to finance the absorption of its neighbor, Belarus, help spread its influence over the other former Soviet republics and lead to the restoration of the Russian/Soviet empire. We hope that the United States will not become an active contributor to an outcome that will tilt the balance of power in Russia's favor.

We also hope that your Administration will keep the door open for the Belarusian American community to partake in discussions that are of special concern to our community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Belarusian Review Debut on the Internet

We are pleased to announce that *Belarusian Review* is being featured on the Internet. You are welcome to visit our Websitte at **http://www.belreview.cz/** and send your comments to BelReview@aol.com. We would like to thank Andrej Ramašeŭski for his outstanding job of setting up the Website. You may also like to visit **http://www.belarus-misc.org/bel-dusa.htm#belreview/** featured on Peter Kasaty's Website.

Acknowledgments

Support in Creating BR: We wish to express our thanks to our friends who helped prepare this issue: Alec Danilovich, Paul Goble, Art Turevich and Jan Zaprudnik for contributing articles; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Jamestown Foundation for permission to reprint copyrighted material; Article 19, Charter '97 and International League for Human Rights, OSCE and the US Department of State for using their material; Orest Deychakiwsky and Alex Silwanowicz for helping with source material; Joseph Pecevich, Alice Kipel and Dr. Anna Bartul for copy editing; George Stankevich for translating, typesetting and distribution; and Vaclaŭ Bahdanovič for reproducing the issue in Belarus.

Joe Price
Editor

FEATURES

State Department Annual Report on Human Rights in Belarus

On February 26, 2001, the US State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor released its 25th annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. The annual report is mandated by US Congress and covers 195 countries worldwide. The review is used by Congress and the State Department as a year-round reference point for questions on human rights. The report found rights situations in China, Myanmar, North Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba, Belarus and Turkmenistan as worsening in 2000.

The report is too voluminous to reprint here in its entirety. Following is the text of the preamble, followed by a listing of topics covered in detail in the report.

BELARUS: Country Report on Human Rights Practices — 2000

"Belarus has a form of governance in which nearly all power is concentrated in the hands of the President and a small circle of advisors. Since his election in July 1994 to a 5-year term as the country's first President, Alexandr Lukashenko has consolidated power steadily in the executive branch through authoritarian means. He used a November 1996 referendum to amend the 1994 Constitution in order to broaden his powers and extend his term in office. Lukashenko ignored the then-Constitutional Court's ruling that the Constitution could not be amended by referendum. As a result, the current political system is based on the 1996 Constitution, which was adopted in an unconstitutional manner. Most members of the international community criticized the flawed referendum and do not recognize the legitimacy of the 1996 Constitution, legislature, or Alexandr Lukashenko's continuation in office beyond the legal expiration of his term in July 1999. Parliamentary elections were held in October, the first since the 1996 referendum. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)/ Office of Democratic Institution and Human Rights (ODIHR) concluded that the elections fell short of international standards and were neither free nor fair. Although the amended Constitution provides for a formal separation of powers, the President dominates all other branches of Government. The legislature that ended its work in November 2000 was not elected directly, but was created out of the remnants of the former Parliament, which Lukashenko disbanded soon after the 1996 referendum. The Constitution limits the legislature to meeting twice per year for no more than a total of 170 days. Presidential decrees made when the legislature is out of session have the force of law, except—in theory—in those cases restricted by the 1996 Constitution. The 1996 Constitution also allows the President to issue decrees having the force of law in circumstances of "specific necessity and urgency," a provision that Lukashenko has interpreted broadly. The judiciary is not independent.

"Law enforcement and internal security responsibilities are shared by the Committee for State Security (KGB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), both of which answer directly to the President. Civilian authorities do not maintain effective control of the security forces. Under Lukashenko's direction, the presidential guard--initially created to protect senior officials--continued to act against the Lukashenko's political enemies with no judicial or legislative oversight. On May 25, 1999, the Law on the State Guard officially entered into force. The law, which had been operative on a de facto basis for a number of years, gives the President the right to subordinate all security bodies to his personal command. Members of the security forces have committed numerous human rights abuses.

"The country's political leadership opposes any significant economic reforms and remains committed ideologically to a planned economy. The authorities claimed that the gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 6 percent, but most independent analysts doubted that figure and said that any growth that has occurred was the result of "aggregate production" fueled by continued massive credits to the debt-ridden state sector. Officials claimed that per capita GDP remained constant at approximately $1,400, but in real terms it was much lower. The majority of workers are employed in the state industrial and agricultural sectors, where wages are lower than the national average and wage arrears are chronic. Although the

unreliability of official statistics makes it difficult to assess accurately economic conditions, living standards for many segments of society continued to decline. Authorities reported that average monthly wages were just over $70 a month by year-end, although independent analysts reported the figure was lower. Residents of small towns and rural areas, where incomes are particularly low, sustain themselves through unreported economic activity and small gardens.

"The Government's human rights record was very poor and worsened significantly in many areas. The authorities severely limit the right of citizens to change their government, and Lukashenko took severe measures to neutralize political opponents. The authorities did not undertake serious efforts to account for the disappearances that occurred in the previous year of well-known opposition political figures. Security forces continued to beat political opponents and detainees. There were reports of severe hazing in the military during the year. Prison conditions remained poor. Security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained citizens, and the number of apparently politically motivated arrests increased, although many of those arrested soon were released. Prolonged detention and delays in trials were common and also occurred in a number of politically sensitive cases. The security services infringed on citizens' privacy rights and monitored closely the activities of opposition politicians and other segments of the population. Severe restrictions on freedom of speech, the press, and peaceful assembly continued, and the authorities did not respect freedom of association. The authorities continued to impose limits on freedom of religion and restricted freedom of movement. Government security agents monitored closely human rights monitors and hindered their efforts. Domestic violence and discrimination against women remained significant problems. Pressures against the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches as well as societal anti-Semitism persist. Authorities continued to harshly restrict workers' rights to associate freely, organize, and bargain. Trafficking in women is a problem."

The rest of the report is divided into the following specific topics:

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person **a.** Political and Extrajudicial Killing **b.** Disappearance **c.** Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment **d.** Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, and Exile **e.** Denial of Fair Public Trial **f.** Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties a. Freedom of Speech and Press b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association c. Freedom of Religion d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation.

Section 3. Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

Section 4. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Section 5. Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status: Women; Children; People with Disabilities; Religious Minorities

Section 6. Workers Rights

a. The Right of Association
b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively
c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor
d. State of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment
e. Acceptable Conditions of Work
f. Trafficking In Persons

The full text of the report is available on the Dept of State Internet Website
http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eur/index.cfm?docid=682

Draft Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Information Security" — ARTICLE 19 Statement

Named after Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ARTICLE 19 is a UK-registered NGO dedicated to combating censorship by promoting freedom of expression and access to information. The organization works, with partners in over 30 countries, to advance media freedom, assist individuals to speak out and campaign for the free flow of information.

According to a March 14 press release, ARTICLE 19, in order to increase awareness about abuses of freedom of expression in Belarus, has set up a new Web page with a regularly updated Bulletin. The aim is to document the numerous examples of violations of freedom of expression, in particular media freedom, which take place in Belarus and which often go unreported internationally. The Belarus Bulletin provides a regularly updated online survey of all the events relating to freedom of expression in Belarus which ARTICLE 19 has observed or been informed about.

Following is the text of the ARTICLE 19 statement on the draft law "On Information Security" in Belarus.

Further Statement by ARTICLE 19, The Global Campaign for Free Expression on the Draft Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Information Security"

8 February 2001

On 25 January 2001, ARTICLE 19, the Global Campaign for Free Expression, issued a statement regarding recent moves in Belarus to introduce legislation aimed at ensuring the "information security" of the country. We stated that the introduction of such a law would constitute a further direct attack on freedom of expression and information, by placing totally unacceptable restrictions on the public's right to know and potentially wiping out any remaining independent media.

Since then, a further draft of the law has emerged and we are informed that it is this latest version which will shortly go before parliament. In terms of layout and structure, this draft is better structured and worded and is generally a more comprehensible document. However, it is still very confusing in places and the provisions contained within it are equally, if not more, concerning. We highlight below some of the fundamental flaws in the Draft Law "On Information Security," outlining just a few of the many ways in which it breaches international law. Such a document should be dropped wholesale from consideration and, as such, does not merit full analysis.

Specific Comments on the latest Draft Law "On Information Security"

The Draft Law "On Information Security," if it became law, would seriously undermine any remaining vestiges of media freedom and access to information in Belarus. It would constitute a further pernicious and negative measure to add to the existing range of laws and decrees in Belarus which seriously restrict the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information. Its all-encompassing scope appears to originate from a desire to control information circulating in all spheres of life and verges on the paranoid; it seriously undermines any commitments to freedom of expression and information contained in the constitution. With presidential elections scheduled for this year, the effects of legislation such as this could wipe out those few independent voices that remain after five years under heavy attack – via both legal and indirect means -- by the regime of President Lukashenka.

Fundamental Purpose is Restrictive

ARTICLE 19 is particularly concerned about the basic precept of the document. Article 1 states that the law aims to lay down the "organisational and legal foundation of activities aimed at ensuring information security." Indeed the document focuses throughout on the presumed imperative need to protect information, therefore placing an emphasis on its withholding, perpetuating the country's culture of secrecy. This is in stark contrast to the internationally accepted view that freedom of expression should be the norm and restrictions the exception in specific, narrowly defined circumstances.

The control on information recommended by the Draft Law is in clear contradiction with the constitutional guarantees which all people residing in the Belarus ought to enjoy, as well as international standards of freedom of expression, particularly those enshrined in Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, which Belarus has ratified.

False News Provisions

The Draft Law emphasises in several places (1) the importance of dissemination of "full, accurate and up-to-date information," the right to protection against "exposure to incomplete, inaccurate and distorted information" and the "protection of rectitude." Such provisions effectively

criminalise the dissemination of false information. False news provisions have been struck down by three national courts and are considered to be unconstitutional by most modern democracies. They are perceived as yet another tool to filter and reduce the information that is made available to the public. Indeed, in the interests of disseminating timely or "up-to-date" and "full" news (as required in the same provision), even the best journalists do make mistakes and the time spent fulfilling too stringent requirements of accuracy would certainly deprive the audience of much information that is of public interest. In addition, the fact that the state security bodies are vested with the right to "prosecute and try in court perpetrators of crimes in the information sphere" (see below under State Control of Information) is a powerful deterrent for journalists, severely limiting their freedom to expose cases of corruption and maladministration.

Licensing and Certification of Media Outlets

As part of the strategy to increase government control of the media and of the means of communication, provisions which may be interpreted to require the mandatory licensing of media are present in several sections of the Draft Law. Article 14 calls for "perfecting the licensing of the activities of corporations and individual businessmen in the field of information protection" and the "certification of information facilities." Furthermore, the information security system envisaged by the law tasks various state security bodies with carrying out the licensing and certification which is highly inappropriate and extremely dangerous.

Licensing of journalists or mandatory licensing of print outlets by the state runs completely counter to international standards under all circumstances. The role of accrediting journalists should be carried out by journalists' organisations or associations alone and has no place in the hands of the authorities. Registration of print media outlets is only acceptable if it is for administrative purposes only, in the same way that all companies should be registered, and is automatically granted. This role therefore belongs to an administrative body of the state and not to state security bodies.

Excessively Broad Restrictions

Legitimate restrictions on freedom of expression should be clearly and narrowly drawn in accordance with international law. The provisions in this draft go substantially further than those restrictions permitted by international law; even by the standards of countries which consistently ignore their commitments under international law, these are restrictive provisions.

Article 3 lists a range of justifications for restricting the free flow of information, the vast majority of which are illegitimate under international law. For example, it cites as priorities for information security the protection of "the preservation and development of democratic institutions of society," "the development of international cooperation on equal terms" and "ensuring the progressive socioeconomic development of the country." Whilst such aims are legitimate as statements of general government policy, they are not in themselves accepted reasons for restricting freedom of expression or information.

Many of these justifications are, in addition, so vague and subjective that they are clearly open to abuse. For example, the law aims at the "preservation and creation of moral and spiritual values of the Belarusian people" or "ensuring worthy representation of the Republic of Belarus in the world community." It also empowers the state to prevent the spread of materials promoting "unsociable behaviour." Article 12 mandates the state to act against information which promotes "social enmity." Almost none of the stated justifications for restricting information in the draft law meet with the narrowly defined standards laid out in international law and should not, therefore, be introduced into law.

State Control of Information

The Draft Law envisages an extremely large degree of state control on information. It calls, in several sections, for this to be increased, for example in Article 13 by "creating a single state register of information resources, organisation and normative regulation of its activities" and "organising and implementing state control over the creation, use and protection of systems and means of collection, processing, storage and transfer of protected information."

The information security system is deemed an integral part of national security and a range of security-related bodies, including the Security Council of Belarus, the State Security Committee (KGB), the State Committee on the Press, as well as the President, are given powers to control it. The approach of placing such a function within the sphere of national security and then tasking security-related bodies with overseeing it says much about the general philosophy, mentioned above, underlying this law and is of serious concern to ARTICLE 19.

Unclear and Circular Language

Laws must be able to be understood by those using and interpreting them. Although better structured that the previous text ARTICLE 19 commented on, there are still many provisions which make no sense (even allowing for translation). They are, therefore, either purposeless because they mean so little or are so vague as to be potentially dangerous. For example, Article 7 states that the aims of ensuring information security are "the provision of rights and freedoms of information security entities which are applied in the information field" and Article 13 states that one of the state's roles is "developing means of protection of information and building them into information systems designed to process protected information."

Conclusion

The proposal of a Draft Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Information Security" is a blatant attempt to silence remaining oppositional voices in Belarus and to deny the public its fundamental right to know. Passage into law of this draft would represent a further step for Belarus away from an environment where freedom of expression and information can flourish, by severely limiting the activities of the media and perpetuating further the process of shutting out any views which do not correspond with the those of the Executive. Some provisions in the Draft Law purport to uphold constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and information; however, everything else in the text stands diametrically opposed to such standards. For Belarus to even begin to comply with its obligations under international law, to abide by the international standards of freedom of expression and to show a serious commitment to the democratic process, the Belarusian government ought to immediately cease consideration of any such legislation.

[*Source:* ARTICLE 19 Web page: **http://www.article19.org/**]

An Empty Seat for Belarus in OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Status of Belarus in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Following is an excerpt from the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus Activity Report No. 3/2001, February 6; 26, 2001, on the status of Belarus in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

"Following the parliamentary elections in October 2000, the National Assembly challenged the representation of Belarus in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly by the 13th Supreme Soviet. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly had confirmed the 13th Supreme Soviet's status in both 1998 and 1999. In January 2001, the mandate of the 13th Supreme Soviet expired.

"In preparation for the decision on the issue by the OSCE Standing Committee on the occasion of its session in Vienna on February 22-23, 2001, the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly nominated a five-member Credentials Committee under the chairmanship of Tone Tingsgard, Sweden -- with other members coming from Belgium, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Portugal. Mr. Severin, President of the OSCE PA, also requested that two members of the Belarus ad hoc Working Group - Gert Weisskirchen, Germany, and Urban Ahlin, Sweden -- undertake a fact-finding mission to Belarus prior to the Standing Committee's session in Vienna. The fact-finding mission took place on February 19-20, 2001.

"On the basis of the testimonies given by the representatives of the Chamber of Representatives, the 13th Supreme Soviet, the fact-finding mission of the Belarus ad hoc Working Group, and by the Head of the Advisory and Monitoring Group, the Credentials Committee recommended the following:

- Leaving the chair of the Belarusian delegation to the OSCE PA empty until democratic developments in Belarus meet OSCE standards;

- Inviting representatives of the 13th Supreme Soviet as well as representatives of the National Assembly to the 2001 Annual Session in Paris in order to address the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly regarding democratic developments in Belarus; and

- Continuing the work of the ad hoc Working Group in support of democratic developments in Belarus.

"In the Standing Committee, the Russian Federation and Armenia opposed the recommendation of the Credentials Committee. Consensus could therefore not be reached. The Russian delegation questioned the right of the Standing Committee to base its decision regarding the credentials of any member state's parliament on an assessment by OSCE democratic standards of the elections in question. The issue will have to be dealt with anew at the session of the Standing Committee in July prior to the Annual Session of the OSCE PA in Paris, which is scheduled to take place from July 6-10, 2001. As a result, the Belarusian chair is de facto empty because it continues to be contested."

US Continues to Recognize Belarus' 13th Supreme Soviet

Following is a statement on Belarus by Ambassador David T. Johnson, US representative to the OSCE, made to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on March 1, 2001.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As my Belarusian and Russian colleagues have noted, the Standing Committee of the OSCE Parliamentary recently decided not to recognize the "National Assembly" as the legitimate Parliament of Belarus. This decision, we believe, reaffirms the fact that the October 2000 elections, which created this body, were neither free nor fair. The United States continues to recognize the 13th Supreme Soviet as the legitimate Belarusian parliament.

Prior to the October elections, the Belarusian authorities failed to implement the election conditions set by the OSCE Troika in May. The OSCE Chairman-in-Office, the European Parliamentary Troika led by Adrian Severin, the European Union, and individual OSCE states all had made clear the need to meet these conditions.

The international community therefore could not recognize the results of these elections.

We believe it is in Belarus' own interest to be seen as a state that respects the rule of law consistent with democratic principles. We urge the Belarusian authorities to carry out in full the four OSCE criteria in connection with the presidential elections. We believe this must be done to ensure that these elections will be recognized as free and fair by the entire international community.

Thank you.

US State Department Officials Visit Minsk

Following is the text of the departure statement made by Deputy Assistant Secretary for the NIS Jon Purnell, accompanied by Office Director for Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus Greg Perett, at the Minsk airport. The statement is followed by Questions and Answers with the press.

Airport Minsk-2 March 20, 2001

Greg Perett and I have had a very full day-and-a-half visit. We very much welcomed the opportunity for an open and frank exchange of views with government officials. We also gained valuable insights into Belarusian reality through meetings with representatives of democratic political organizations, NGOs, the independent press, businessmen, educators, wives of the disappeared and political prisoners, and representatives of the very vibrant Belarusian cultural sphere.

As Ambassador Kozak recently told President Lukashenko, President Bush and his Administration are ready to work for better bilateral relations.

To achieve that goal the government of Belarus must take a number of concrete steps to bring it back into compliance with the commitments each of the members of the Euro-Atlantic community has made concerning the civic and political rights of its citizens. As Secretary of State Powell wrote recently to Foreign Minister Khvostov, "These commitments, freely made by all participating states, are fundamental to ensuring the freedom and prosperity of all European peoples."

We have discussed with Belarusian officials the precise steps which the government must take. We have indicated that we are prepared to take positive steps in this context. So the Belarusian authorities face a concrete choice. Which direction they choose will have historic implications for the future of Belarus. In this regard, measures to restrict freedom, such as those represented by draft Decree # 8, can only have negative consequences and should not be put into force.

Belarus has a golden opportunity during the next few months to create the conditions which allow it to resume its rightful place in the Euro-Atlantic community.

If Belarus holds presidential elections in accord with the OSCE criteria, the United States — like other OSCE member states— will recognize and work with the duly-elected authorities to ensure that Belarus is truly independent, prosperous, and democratic. This is an opportunity the Belarusian authorities should not miss.

Question: We are aware that you have discussed with Belarusian officials draft decree #8, which essentially puts a ban not just on humanitarian assistance but on any support to politicians here. Would you comment on that?

Answer: Yes, we did talk about the draft decree, and we made it clear to the Belarusian officials with whom we met that we thought the decree would have a negative effect on the election process, and we urged them to think again about bringing this decree into effect. And we made it clear that we were prepared to discuss with them the concerns, which might have led them to issue the decree. And it would be far better to find positive ways to address any concerns than to issue a decree.

Q: Have you discussed with Belarusian officials the past elections to the National Assembly and if so, are you aware of the multiple violations that were noted by international observers?

A: We did not really discuss the past elections in any detail because our position is well known. We focused instead on the upcoming elections and stressed that they need to be free and fair and in no way should resemble the past parliamentary elections.

Q: Are there any developments in the political situation which you can characterize as positive on the eve of the presidential election in Belarus?

A: As far as positive developments are concerned, I would certainly have to note that the Belarusian officials with whom we met expressed a desire for better relations with the United States, and our Ambassador has heard the same message from Belarus. We are certainly prepared to discuss better relations in the context of very tangible, practical steps toward improving the political situation in Belarus.

Q: Why is it that you call the presidential decree, which has already been signed, still a draft decree? Does that mean that you hope that it will not go into effect after a month, and secondly, in this connection, how do you regard president Lukashenko's recent statements that due to the Borodin case the United States has no more say in Belarus.

A: As far as the decree is concerned, when I use the word "draft," I am certainly not trying to speak as a lawyer or anyone who has a juridical point of view. I simply mean to point out the fact that the decree has not yet taken effect, and we would certainly hope that we can find a way of, perhaps, discussing some of the issues that may have prompted the decree and we would certainly hope that there might be some change in the decree between now and time that it takes effect. As far as the Borodin case is concerned, again, this is a very straightforward legal matter in the United States, and it is being handled according to standard legal procedures.

Q: And as for Lukashenko's statement?

A: I would leave that to the president to comment on.

Q: How would you react to the statement that the chill in the U.S.- Belarus relations is very much because of the integration between Russia and Belarus?

A: I would say that is a completely incorrect analysis, that at no point in our discussions with Belarusian officials did we discuss the Russia-Belarus union. We have never made that an issue between the United States and Belarus.

Q: Can you brief us on what exactly was being discussed at your meeting with the four presidential candidates?

A: It is standard procedure for American officials, such as myself, that we meet with as wide a variety of people as possible when we visit any country. And, while we were here we met with, as you mentioned, the possible presidential candidates, some members of the press and representatives of non-governmental organizations and many others. In our conversations with the four gentlemen that you refer to we had a very useful exchange of views about the current political situation in Belarus. This helps me bring back to Washington a much fuller, more complete picture of the situation in Belarus.

Q: How could you comment on the fact that today OSCE media representative Freimut Duve was denied Belarusian visa to visit the country?

A: I am afraid I really don't know the details on that situation. I would suggest that you check directly with the OSCE. If indeed he has not received the visa, that is most unfortunate, but I don't know the details.

Q: Is there indeed a more rigid position towards Belarus on the part of the U.S. Government? Also, how would you comment on the recent campaign against the United States with charges of espionage here?

A: As far as the U.S. position is concerned. Is it harder? Is it softer? My basic message is the U.S. position remains unchanged. As I mentioned in my statement, the United States continues to support the same fundamental principles that it has always supported. We support the independence, the democratic development and prosperity of all the states in this region. That position has not changed and will not change. As far as the charge, the television show about spying by the United States, I can only say that the television show was nonsense.

Q: At whose initiative this particular visit was arranged and are there any further visits planned at this point?

A: This visit was arranged at our initiative because we have a new administration in Washington and because I have only relatively recently started my new duties, and because we have a new ambassador in Minsk, we thought this would be an appropriate time to meet with Belarusian officials to talk about the state of our relations.

Q: Whether there are any further visits planned at this point?

A: No, nothing specifically planned.

Q: Did you meet with relatives of missing persons and prisoners?

A: Yes.

Source: US Embassy in Minsk, Web site: http://www.usembassy.minsk.by

Parliamentary Troika Statement on Belarus

MINSK, 7 March 2001 — The Parliamentary Troika, composed of members of the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, visited Belarus 5-7 March 2001. The delegation was chaired by Mr. Adrian Severin, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly; Mr. Jan Marinus Wiersma, Chairman of the European Parliament delegation for relations with Belarus, and Mr. Terry Davis, Chairman of the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Other members of the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE and the Council of Europe were also part of the delegation. The visit of the delegation took place as part of a continuing, joint effort of the three Parliamentary institutions to further democratic developments in Belarus and on the basis of a profound wish to integrate Belarus and its people in the democratic structures of Europe.

The members of the delegation held several meetings with representatives of the Government and the institutions of the Republic of Belarus, as well as with representatives of the political opposition and civil society, in order to be informed about the situation in the country after the Parliamentary Elections of October 2000 and in the run-up to the Presidential Elections which will take place later this year. They met with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Khvostov; the Head of the Presidential Administration, Mr. Myasnikovich; the President of the Electoral Committee, Ms. Ermoshina; the Speaker, Mr. Popov, and the Leadership of Chamber of Representatives, the Speaker Mr. Voitovich and the Leadership of the Council of the Republic. They also met with potential candidates for the upcoming Presidential Elections, the Advisory Council of Political Parties and the 13th Supreme Soviet Presidium, representatives of trade unions and women organizations and with representatives of human rights groups and NGOs as well as with relatives of disappeared persons. During the preparation for the Parliamentary Elections, the Parliamentary Troika and its institutions had formulated four criteria, regarding transparency of the electoral process, access to the mass media, meaningful powers for the new Parliament and the observance of a "peace period." These criteria were considered as necessary conditions for the elections to be free and fair. In October 2000, the Parliamentary Troika had to conclude that insufficient progress had been achieved to satisfy the four criteria and that normal relations with the Parliamentary body resulting from these elections could therefore not be recommended. The Parliamentary Troika will be closely watching further developments, in particular the conditions governing the by-elections taking place on 18 March 2001, before taking any further steps on this issue.

With a view to the Presidential Elections, which will take place later this year, the Parliamentary Troika stressed that free and democratic conduct of these elections would be considered as a major progress in the process of democratization in Belarus, and would therefore contribute to ending the international isolation of the country. It must come as no surprise that the Troika will apply the same criteria to those Presidential Elections.

In order for the Presidential Elections to be recognized as free and democratic the Parliamentary Troika expects:

a. that the process of preparation and implementation of these elections will be fully transparent and democratic in all its aspects, in particular as regards the process of registration of the candidates, the composition of the electoral commissions and the counting of the votes;

b. that the conditions of access to the mass media, in particular to the electronic media, and other possibilities for organizing their election campaign will be equal for all candidates;

c. that all bodies of the State and the Government will completely refrain from any act that may be considered as harassment of candidates, their relatives or their supporters; d. that all those engaged in (especially non-candidate related) domestic election observation and the recruitment and training for these activities will be completely free in carrying out their work, also in cooperation with international institutions, which constitutes an essential element in guaranteeing the transparency and verifiability of the electoral process.

The Parliamentary Troika stresses that it is part of the democratization process that the people of Belarus will have a true possibility of choice when electing their president. The Parliamentary Troika points out that the organization of the elections according to international standards as formulated by the OSCE, is only part of the democratization process. The Parliamentary Troika expresses its continuing concern about the human rights situation and at the lack of progress in investigating the disappearances of political opponents, Mr. Zakharenko, Mr. Gonchar, Mr. Krasovsky, as well as the journalist Mr. Zavadsky.

The Parliamentary Troika expresses once again its full commitment to improve relations with the people of Belarus as part of the process to increase peace and stability in the whole of Europe. It will therefore continue to offer its support, and the support of the institutions it represents, to all those interested in the strengthening of the democratic process in Belarus, be they opposition or administration.

[*Source:* **http://www.osce.org**]

U.S. Condemns Attacks on Freedom Day Demonstrators In Miensk

Following is the text of a March 30 press statement by Richard Boucher, US State Department Spokesman, on arrests of Belarusians marking Freedom Day in Miensk on March 25.

Belarus: Prosecutions Following Belarusian Freedom Day

The United States is deeply concerned by the Belarusian authorities' treatment of Belarusian citizens who publicly marked

Belarusian Freedom Day on March 25. The Belarusian authorities refused a permit for a march in Minsk and used force to disperse Belarusian citizens who peacefully gathered to mark this date. About 20 people were arrested nation-wide. Some have been jailed, such as Vintsuk Vyachorka, Chairman the Belarusian National Front, a major democratic political party, who received a sentence of 15 days. Others, such as parliamentarian Ludmila Gryaznova, were fined more than a month's salary. Human rights activist Ales Belyatsky and democratic youth leader Pavel Severyenets await trial. Arrests are reportedly continuing.

Freedom of assembly and expression are basic human rights that Belarus is bound to respect. The Belarusian authorities are calling for improved relations with the international community. We urge the Belarusian authorities to back up their declarations with deeds, and to begin by immediately releasing Mr. Vyachorka and others jailed, dismissing charges against Mr. Belyatsky and Mr. Severyenets, and ending punitive measures against all those who marked Belarusian Freedom Day.

[*Source:* U.S. Department of State, **http://www.state.gov/**]

U.S. Reminds UN of Human Rights Violations, Belarus Included

Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli, Head of U.S. Delegation to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, presented on March 30, 2001 his report on human rights situations around the globe. Following is the excerpt from the report dealing with Belarus country situation: "The government of Belarus continues to resist the democratic tide of human rights and fundamental freedoms that swept across Central and Eastern Europe more than a dozen years ago. The parliamentary elections of this past October were neither free nor fair. The opposition was denied access to the media and most independent opposition candidates were denied registration on trivial technicalities. Former President Lukashenko, whose term ended in 1999, still refuses to leave his office and continues to quash protest and intimidate peaceful demonstrators. As recently as March 25th, for example, riot police commanded personally by the Minister of Internal Affairs attacked a demonstration in Minsk, beating numerous participants. In addition, a number of prominent opposition figures and journalists have disappeared — amid strong indications of government involvement — while others have been jailed. This is an outrage. We call upon Belarus to uphold its commitments, permit freedom of association and media coverage, and create a climate that will facilitate free and fair elections with full participation of all opposition parties."

[*Source:* Charter 97, April 2, 2001]

Statement in the U.S. Congress by Rep. Christopher H. Smith, Co-Chairman, U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission)

The Honorable Christopher H. Smith
April 4, 2001

Atmosphere of Trust Missing in Belarus

Mr. Speaker, this fall, the Belarusian Government is planning to hold their second presidential elections since independence. Judging by the continuing actions of the repressive regime of Aleksandr Lukashenka, free, fair, and transparent elections - consistent with Belarus' freely undertaken OSCE commitments - will be very difficult to achieve. Democratic elections require an all-encompassing atmosphere of trust and a respect for basic human rights. Unfortunately, recent actions in Belarus do nothing to encourage such trust.

Most recently, on March 25, Belarusian authorities cracked down on participants of the Independence Day march, arresting and beating several protestors, subsequently fining and jailing some, including Belarusian Popular Front Chairman Vintsuk Vyachorka, who received a 15-day sentence on March 29, Ales Byalatsky, head of the human rights center "Viasna", who received a 10-day sentence, and Yuri Belenky, acting chairman of the Conservative Christian Party, who also received a 10-day sentence. Also detained and beaten was 17-year-old Dmitri Yegorov, a photojournalist for a Grodno-based, non-state newspaper.

On the day of the march, Belarusian state television accused the opposition of "seeking to draw Belarus into some bloody turmoil", reflecting its increasingly shrill tone of late. Earlier this year, for instance, Belarusian television claimed the CIA was intensifying "subversive activity" as the presidential election draws nearer. On March 24, Belarus' KGB chief pledged on Belarusian television to intensify surveillance of foreigners in order to prevent them from interfering in the country's domestic matters.

On March 12, Lukashenka signed Decree #8, which essentially imposes restrictions on assistance from abroad offered to NGOs for democracy building and human rights, including election monitoring. Moreover, the Belarusian Government has claimed that the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group's (AMG) domestic election observation project does not conform with the Belarusian Constitution and Electoral Code, although nowhere does the law address the conduct of election observation, and the government has resisted AMG efforts to convene a working group regarding the administrative dimension of the elections. Lukashenka himself has asserted that he would ban the training of election observers by non-Belarusian bodies, telling reporters: "There will be no guerillas in Belarus." Earlier this year, Lukashenka also accused the AMG for "exceeding their mandate," saying the OSCE was planning to train some "14,000-18,000 fighters" under the guise of election observers.

Mr. Speaker, I am also concerned about recent assaults on religious communities. Last month, the Council of Ministers restricted visits by foreign clergy for "non-religious" purposes -- including contact with religious and other organizations, participation in conferences and other events, or charitable activities. Government officials are also refusing to register some Reform Jewish communities because they do not have "legal" addresses. In February, state-controlled Belarusian television aired a documentary alleging Catholicism as a threat to the very existence of the Belarusian nation. And in January, leaders of Belarus' Protestant community alleged that state newspapers carried biased articles that present Pentecostals as "wild fanatics."

Religious freedom is not the only liberty in peril. Freedom of the press and of self expression are also in jeopardy.

Editors of a variety of newspapers are being fined on fictitious and trumped-up charges for violating the Law on Press and Other Mass Media. Various periodicals are being confiscated and destroyed, and distributors of independent newspapers have been arrested. Youth organizations have been accused of engaging in activities that weaken the Belarusian statehood and undermining socioeconomic stability. Teenagers have been arrested for picketing and protesting, and others have been detained for distributing newspapers or pasting stickers advocating reform and calling on the authorities to solve the cases of political disappearances. Belarusian Television and Radio (BTR) has also canceled scheduled addresses to be made by potential presidential candidates or opposition leaders. The Deputy Minister of Education has ordered heads of the educational community to ban seminars conducted by the People's University.

Lukashenka has also undertaken repressive acts against the potential presidential candidates and their families in an attempt to thwart their campaign progress.

Family members of former Prime Minister Mikhail Chigir have become the target of persecution. Chigir's wife has been accused of interfering with the work of the police, and his son, Alexander, has been charged with large scale larceny. Chigir is not the only potential candidate whose actions have been thwarted by Lukashenka. Semyon Domash's meeting with potential voters at the Tourist Hotel was canceled on orders from the Mogilev authorities and a director of the club-house of the Brest Association of Hearing-Impaired people lost her job after hosting a voters' meeting with Domash. Vladimir Goncharik, a labor leader, has had to deal with newly state-created "unions" trying to muscle out unions supporting him. Two officials of a manufacturing plant were reprimanded by a Borisov city court for hosting a meeting between Chigir and employees at the plant.

When one looks at these and other recent actions of the Lukashenka regime, the inescapable conclusion is that the regime has created an

unhealthy environment in advance of the elections. Mr. Speaker, the regime's behavior is obviously not conducive to the promotion of free and fair elections. A few weeks ago, President Lukashenka stressed the need to establish an atmosphere of trust in bilateral Belarusian-U.S. relations. I strongly encourage Mr. Lukashenka to translate his words into concrete deeds that will encourage this trust and lead to the emergence of Belarus from its self-imposed isolation from the Euro-Atlantic community of democracies. [*Source*: The Congressional Record]

THOUGHTS and OBSERVATIONS

Is Moscow About to Cut Lukashenka Loose?

By Paul Goble

Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka has threatened to expel any diplomat who interferes in the domestic affairs of his country in advance of a presidential poll there later this year, a reflection of his increasing isolation both domestically and internationally.

Lukashenka told the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS on that he would put in jail anyone Belarusian courts found guilty of espionage. Moreover, he said that he would expel any diplomat — including envoys from Western countries — who used an embassy to spy on Belarus or interfere in the elections.

In addition, the Belarusian leader linked his domestic opponents to foreign donors who he said had given the dissidents cash and office equipment. Such people, he said, "openly declare their intention to turn Belarus into another Yugoslavia. But that will not go. Electing a president will be up to the people of Belarus rather than to [foreign] security services." His election, Lukashenka added, will take place without the "fuss" usually generated by journalists.

Lukashenka's latest outburst is typical of a man who has expressed admiration for governing styles of Stalin and Hitler and who has shown little mercy to his opponents as he has moved to reestablish a highly authoritarian regime in Belarus. And his remarks come on the heels of a Belarusian state television program charging the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency of supporting the opposition to Lukashenka's continuation in office.

The tone of that program is suggested by one of the state television officials who oversaw its production. Aleksandr Zimovsky noted that "the Americans are making a crude mistake in regarding Belarus as a playground for their spies and agents. Belarusian special services have something with which to counter their attempts to act uncontrollably in our country."

But Lukashenka's remarks this time may reflect something more than his typical bravado: they may reflect growing concerns on his part about his own isolation domestically and internationally, on the one hand, and an effort by him to counter this isolation by portraying himself as the only true defender of Belarus against shadowy forces from abroad.

Recent polls taken in Belarus show that support for Lukashenka is declining, even among his traditional rural base. And in addition to continuing Western European and American criticism of Minsk's violation of human rights, the Belarusian leader now appears to be losing support from the one place he had always expected to receive it: the Russian government in Moscow.

In recent weeks, Russian commentators have been increasingly critical of Lukashenka's performance, especially his all-too-public differences with Moscow over the proper response to the detention in New York of Russia- Belarus Union state secretary Pavel Borodin on an extradition request by Swiss prosecutors. Lukashenka wanted a hard line, Moscow a softer one, and Lukashenka left Moscow a day early over this issue during a January visit.

After that diplomatic spat, some Russian newspapers pointedly suggested that the Russian government was distancing itself from Lukashenka and was even interviewing possible replacements to head the Belarusian government. As one Moscow observer put it at the time, everyone understands that the president of Belarus "is chosen by the Kremlin rather than by the Belarusian people."

Such Russian criticism of Lukashenka only increased this week in the wake of the communist victory in the Moldovan parliamentary elections, with several Moscow analysts suggesting that taking Moldova into the Russia- Belarus Union would further compound Russia's problems, just as forming the union with Lukashenka's Belarus already had. Faced with this apparent softening of Russian support and confronting continuing criticism from both the West and the Belarusian people, Lukashenka appears to be retreating into the fortress mentality typical of authoritarian rulers when they begin to feel that they are losing their grip. Again and again, such leaders have sought to save themselves at home by attacking supposed enemies abroad.

Occasionally, such lashing out has in fact won them a respite, but more often, their threatening languages has only highlighted just how removed from reality those who make them are. And by calling attention to that fact, their remarks cut into whatever support they may still have, thus heightening rather than solving the political problems that such leaders inevitably have created for themselves. (RFE/RL Security Watch. Vol. 2, No. 9, March 6, 2001)

Paul Goble is Director of Communications and Technology, RFE/RL, and Publisher of the RFE/RL Newsline.

Russian-Belarusian Minuet

By Alec Danilovich

On April 2, 2001 Russia and Belarus celebrate the 5th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty on a Community of Sovereign Republics. Outside Russia and Belarus observers indeed have the impression that unification has been accomplished that it has been a done deal. In reality, Russian-Belarusian unification has yet to take place, or even to advance very far.

After several years of intense effort and after the conclusion of six major bilateral treaties that have incrementally provided for full-fledged integration, from common currency to supranational governing bodies, Russian Constitutional Court Chief Justice Baglai assessed the situation as follows: The Russian and Belarusian leaders "have not yet approached the problem of unification in earnest." A good measure of earnestness in this matter is that half of the articles of the 1999 Union Treaty, the most recent to date, would require the amendment of 11 fundamental articles of the Russian Constitution, including those that state the form of government and the country's name. Although this contradiction may be solved by a referendum, the Russian leadership carefully steered away from this mechanism, and the necessary constitutional amendments were not introduced or even seriously considered.

The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus also does not allow for such a union. The 1994 Belarusian Constitution plainly stipulates Belarus's neutrality and nonalignment. The current Belarusian constitution adopted as a result of the controversial 1996 referendum, also contains the same

provision. I believe that the real causes of integrative initiatives and of an unsteady and inconclusive path to Russian-Belarusian integration lie predominantly in Russian domestic politics. Russian-Belarusian bilateral relations are in the grip of domestic politics to a degree that may be exceptional. To illustrate this supposition, let's briefly review the main instances of an ongoing saga of unification.

The 1994 Monetary Union

The Russian-Belarusian unification minuet started in 1994 with the signing of the Monetary Union, which provided for the fusion of the monetary systems and elimination of tariffs. The treaty also offered credits to Belarus to meet its balance of payment with Russia.

Prime Minister Kebich, as a presidential hopeful in the first Belarusian presidential election, had a very strong personal interest in concluding the Monetary Treaty. The timing of the Treaty signing points to obvious political and electoral overtones of this initiative. By signing a monetary union with Russia only months before the election, Prime Minister Kebich would appear, in the eyes of the population, a savior in Belarus's hour of economic crisis. The one-to-one fixed exchange rate of the Belarusian to the Russian ruble certainly would boost Kebich's chances since everyone knew that the Russian ruble was worth almost four times more.

Despite the lavish offers to Belarus contained in the Treaty and Moscow's unambiguous support of Kebich, the winner of the election was Lukashenka. It is interesting to note that Lukashenka, the current great champion of integration, had not been able to find a niche in the official Minsk unification crusade in 1994. Praising unification would have played into the hands of the prime minister, so he chose to criticize the Monetary Union on the grounds of its violation of the previous Russian-Belarusian agreements. Shortly after assuming the office, Lukashenka publicly denounced the Monetary Treaty with Russia signed by his predecessor.[1]

Lukashenka announced his intention to tie closer links with Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, proving that he would seek cooperation with his neighbors and not to stick to Russia.

The 1995 Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighborliness, and Cooperation

During 1995, Russia and Belarus concluded a series of cooperative agreements the most important of which was the Treaty of Friendship. It only affirmed the principles of mutual respect, sovereignty, and peaceful settlement of disputes with no immediate bearing on unification.

However, the visit of Russian President Yeltsin in Minsk for the signing ceremony marked a stark turnabout in Lukashenka's foreign policy orientations. Lukashenka could have realized that good relations with Russia could be an easy fix of the Belarusian economy without reform, while rapprochement and eventual merger would allow him to become a powerful player within the vast Russian political borderlands. Given Yeltsin's precarious health and a strong opposition to Yeltsin's rule in Russia, Lukashenka could have real chances to become Russian president.

The 1996 Treaty on a Community of Sovereign Republics

In April 1996, the two countries formed an international entity called Community of Sovereign Republics. Belarus and Russia were to safeguard their sovereignty national attributes and symbols, but their actions in foreign policy, economic reform, transport, and energy were to be coordinated. The Treaty also envisaged the introduction by the end of 1997 of common single currency.

The Treaty created several joint supranational organs, including Supreme Council composed of the highest officials of each country, an Executive Committee with the Russian prime minister on top and a Joint Parliamentary Assembly. Lukashenka was appointed Chairman of the Supreme Council for the next two years on a rotational basis. For some reason, five years later he keeps assuming these responsibilities.

The real impact of the Treaty was far less than Lukashenka had expected. In fact, by signing this treaty and making of the signing ceremony a media event, Lukashenka aspired to break into the Russian political space and become "a regent to the ailing Russian tsar." It did not actually happened this way.

Yeltsin, on his part, used the unification rhetoric to boost his meager chances for reelection in 1996. Unification with Belarus could go both ways for him: it would undeniably draw voters nostalgic of the USSR, appease the opposition, and, if need be, could provide legal basis for constitutional amendments and postponement of the election, an option that had been given a great deal of consideration by Yeltsin's planners.

The Treaty did not go any further beyond political declarations and a media event staged amidst the electoral campaign. Yeltsin fooled his junior Belarusian partner and obtained all utilities out of the Treaty without letting Lukashenka enter the Russian political space.

The 1997 Union Treaty

The following year unification initiative came from Russia and directly from President Yeltsin. Early in 1997, Yeltsin proclaimed his desire to unite Russia and Belarus in one state. He suggested holding a referendum on the unification of the two countries. It should be pointed out in this connection that a referendum would have been the surest means of bringing about unification: a) the idea was popular in both Russia and Belarus; and b) a referendum would help to override legal and constitutional impediments to merger.

Lukashenka was again cajoled into thinking that he had chances to become a big player in Russian politics. In the course of the Treaty preparation, Russia made more than one about-face. Where Yeltsin had suggested a referendum and concrete steps, the actual arrangement turned to be very loose and did not introduce anything substantially new to the Treaty on the Community of Sovereign Republics signed a year earlier. In many respects, the Union Treaty was even looser. It did not contain any provision that would commit Russia to making concrete steps toward merger, such as a monetary union, as the 1996 Treaty had specified, for example. The resulting grouping was neither fish, flesh, nor fowl. It turned out again that only President Yeltsin benefitted from this integration game, using it in the Kremlin bitter power struggle. [2]

Some concrete yet small steps were made. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Russia-Belarus Union, at its session on December 15, 1997, approved the Union's first budget, although it was not legally binding. But major elements of the Treaty remain unimplemented, and one more time Lukashenka's desire to break into the Russian political space was skillfully exploited by Yeltsin. To counter this adverse attitude of the Kremlin to the Union, Lukashenka set about to bypass the Russian central government and established direct cooperative links with Russian regions.

One event showed to what extent the formal Russian-Belarusian union was insignificant and inviable. Angry at Lukashenka for holding two journalists under arrest, Yeltsin in October 1997 blocked Lukashenka's visit to two Russian provincial cities by denying his plane clearance to land. The incident looked especially odd considering that Lukashenka was Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Russian-Belarusian Union and thus, in theory at least, entitled to land wherever in the Union he pleased. It is hard to imagine anything that could more vividly depict the deplorable state of unification than the spectacle of denied access to one of the constituent parts of the Union.

The 1998 Treaty on Equal Rights

In 1998 Yeltsin and Lukashenka signed the Agreement on the Equal Rights of Russian and Belarusian Citizens. Although the 1998 Agreement was not as spectacular in appearance as the 1994, 1996 and 1997 treaties, it had some practical consequences for integration. It was about concrete technicalities of unification in legal and social matters, yet it did not introduce common citizenship, and Lukashenka's hopes went unfulfilled.

The 1999 Union State Treaty

The process of this treaty preparation was disturbing and confrontational. The Russians and Belarusians came up with quite incompatible drafts. The bargaining over the shape of the would-be union state was long and intense, reflecting mainly Yeltsin's changing tactics during the run-up to the Russian legislative election. The year 1999 was crucial for Yeltsin because it was his last chance to pass presidential power to a candidate who would protect him and his family from prosecution. Throughout that year, Yeltsin's planners entertained the possibility of playing the Milosevic scenario to keep Yeltsin in power after his constitutional mandate as president came to an end. People close to Yeltsin publicly suggested that Yeltsin would be "a realistic candidate to head the unified state." Accordingly, in the beginning of the year, Russia and Belarus pledged themselves to form a union state, complete with a presidency, a joint cabinet and parliament. Finally, after Yeltsin found a reliable heir in the person of Putin, the Milosevic plan was tossed out and a new scenario was played. That remodeled the original shape of the union state. The manipulation of the timing of the signing ceremony, which had been postponed three times, was also telling. To keep Lukashenka at bay, Russia dismissed the idea of a common presidency and at Russian insistence, common governing bodies were designed to be quite amorphous, just as they had been in the 1996 Union Treaty. Finally, the Russian-prepared version won out, and the treaty was signed on December 8, a few days before the Russian legislative election.

Lukashenka's own domestic situation in 1999 was uncertain because of controversies surrounding the referendum of 1996. The infamous referendum prolonged Lukashenka's presidential mandate for two additional years to 2001, while the original time in office expired in July 1999. The Belarusian opposition scheduled presidential elections to be held in May 1999 in accordance with the 1994 Constitution. By that time, Lukashenka faced protests both from the domestic opposition and international community that had not recognized the results of the referendum. Therefore, Lukashenka's drive for unification was especially strong in 1999. A union state, complete with a presidency, a joint cabinet and parliament with direct legislation would land Lukashenka on the Russian ground and make him a player in Russian politics and save him from the political and economic mess he had created in his own country.

It is surely no accident that Yeltsin, a consummate political schemer and shrewd strategist, embraced the idea of unification during his time in office to regain or maintain power domestically, while Lukashenka, cornered with an irresponsible foreign policy of over reliance on Russia, played into Yeltsin's hands.

Putin and Unification

Events since the conclusion of the 1999 Union State Treaty suggest that Yeltsin will not be the last president to manipulate the unification issue for domestic political purposes. In October 1999, President Lukashenka said in despair when the signing ceremony was postponed yet again, "If Yeltsin does not sign the treaty, I still have enough time to sign it with someone else." Alas, his hope died with the election of a new Russian president. President Putin has enjoyed unusually high approval ratings and support across the political spectrum, and like Yeltsin in similar periods of popularity Putin has not only eschewed flamboyant integration initiatives but has slowed the process significantly. If my analysis is correct, Lukashenka will need to wait until Putin's authority weakens as Yeltsin's did to see the new Russian president show interest in unification.

After the legislative elections in December 1999, the Putin government received massive support in parliament, not only from traditional Yeltsin allies such as Unity and SPS (Union of Right Forces), but from the Zhirinovsky block, the Victory Block (alias communists), OVR of Primakov and Luzhkov, and Yabloko as well.

In 1993 and in 1995, Yeltsin had been unable to get the kind of Duma he wanted. Putin managed to get a malleable parliament in his first attempt. In the old Duma a few large factions (e.g., the CPRF and Our Home is Russia) were able to establish a stable majority with minimal agreement among themselves. In the new Duma, there are nine factions, creating a much more fluid situation. The "multipolar" and politically "colorful" Duma that convened on January 18, 2000 allows the president practically unlimited room to maneuver. The opposition between Duma and presidency that characterized the Yeltsin period has ceased, and the executive dominates the parliament.

Following Yeltsin's resignation, and while he was still just an interim president, Putin had to face a ballot in March 2000 to become plenipotentiary president. During this period of vulnerability, he ostentatiously favored union with Belarus. Thus, it was that on January 26, Putin and Lukashenka solemnly exchanged the ratification tools of the Union State Treaty. During the ceremony, Putin stated that the union of Russia and Belarus was open to other countries. Appealing to the electorate's nostalgia, he continued, "Holding Russian-Belarusian discussions right after the CIS summit is not a coincidence. This way we wanted to show that anyone could stay here."

The difference between Putin's promotion of Russian-Belarusian Union before the election and after his landslide victory is stark. Since ascending to the presidency, Putin has maintained an unusually high approval rating and enjoys the support of major political forces in the country. Although he has faced several minor challenges and overt opposition from Russia's main oligarchs, his power and popularity have never been in danger. And so, surely not coincidentally, he has demoted unification with Belarus in his priorities. "Practical work" that candidate Putin promised to do has not yet begun. On the contrary, the trend toward distancing himself from the 1999 Union State Treaty is quite perceptible. Sovetskaya Rosya laments: "...the process of rapprochement with Belarus has been slowed down." Even more startling, Russia initiated full-scale customs inspections of all goods imported from Belarus in September 2000, provoking Belarus to retaliate with duties on imports from Russia.

Belarus has done nothing to provoke the Kremlin's current reticence toward unification. On the contrary, Lukashenka persists in his commitment to restore the Soviet Union, despite the dashing of his hope to win the Russian throne now that it is occupied by a young and promising tsar. Like Milosevic of Yugoslavia, his commitment is one he cannot afford to abandon with the presidential election in 2001. He knows perfectly well who is responsible for dragging out unification, but as previously he puts the blame for lack of progress on mysterious Russian officials and international plotters.

Early in February 2001, Sergei Ivanov, the secretary of the Russian powerful Security Council, announced Russia's new

approach to the problems of the post-Soviet space and its main formal structure, the Commonwealth of Independent States. Ivanov said that there had been a radical reassessment of the major tenets of Russia's policy toward the CIS. It has become clear, according to Ivanov, that the acceleration of integration toward merger is impossible in near future.

Currently, the Kremlin considers two alternative courses of policy towards its post-Soviet neighbors: 1) Promotion of integration within the post-Soviet borderlands as an absolute value that would justify heavy expenses associated with this course, as well as more concessions to Russia's partners, or 2) Pursuit of a more pragmatic policy. The current debts of CIS countries to Russia exceed 1.5 billion US dollars in state-to-state credits alone. The total debts amount to over 5.5 billion. According to Ivanov, Russia has made its choice in favor of its economic interests and interests of its national security by focusing on bilateral relations with post-Soviet countries.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Belarus can prove to be a useful political and military ally of Moscow; the economic side of unification, however, cannot be very attractive to Russia. An important question naturally arises in relation with this new pragmatism in Russia's policy towards its post-Soviet partners: What will be the fate of the Russian-Belarusian Union State? Of course, if one follows the logic of Russian neo-pragmatism, Russians should set about to count the money that will be needed for the completion of Russian-Belarusian integration. There is no doubt that the sum will be so shocking that the movement to union will be suspended immediately and for long time, probably to the next Russian presidential election.

Although Russia and Belarus agreed in 1999 to introduce the Russian ruble as the union common currency in 2005, this date is far away and given the record of repeated failures of common currency introduction, it does not really mean anything.

It would not be totally unfair to surmise that Russian-Belarusian integration has slowed because President Putin has no immediate need to continue the process, which squares with my hypothesis that unification is a tool the Kremlin exploits for domestic political purposes, nothing more. So "the tale of the Treaty" is likely to continue.

NOTES:

1. Lukashenka's image as a fighter for the restoration of the USSR turns out to be unsubstantiated. The official story about Lukashenka being the only deputy of the Supreme Soviet in 1991 who voted against the dissolution of the Soviet Union has proved to be a myth carefully maintained by Lukashenka and his associates. In fact, Lukashenka was absent at that parliamentary session (Solovey, Valery. 1998. "The Hopes and Fears of Russian Politicians. In: Belarus and Russia: Society and State. Moscow: Prava Cheloveka. In Russian.)

2. Yeltsin had undergone quintuple heart bypass operation, followed by a long recovery; the mass media increasingly hinted that Yeltsin would be unable to return to the Kremlin. To survive politically, Yeltsin needed to reestablish his slipping grip on power, and a grandiose foreign policy initiative provided a means to achieve this goal.

Alec Danilovich has recently earned a Ph.D. in political science at Southern Illinois University and also holds a Candidate of Science degree from a Soviet institution. He has a certificate in translation from the Grenoble University, France, and currently lives in Montreal, where he works as a translator. In this article, he further advances one of the arguments he made in his doctoral dissertation entitled "The Domestic Politics of International Integration: Russia and Belarus."

The Childhood of a Nation

By S. Paŭloŭski

Lately I am becoming increasingly convinced that the behavior and reasoning of Belarusians resemble the actions and thoughts of a child. I am not inferring that there is anything inherently bad in such a characterization. On the contrary, in this context perhaps there isn't. I am not referring to incomprehensible irksome or amusing manifestations or arrested development, but precisely to an early stage of development — the slow but inevitable formation of the nation-body and mind.

You might reply that actually our nation is old, and is rather suffering a kind of dementia often attendant with advanced age. As it applies to Belarus and Belarusians one should distinguish between social and national development. The formation of the contemporary Belarusian nation as such really began in the 20th century; and in such matters a century is not a long period. Besides, who can tell how long it takes a nation to mature ?

Until now the Belarusians did not approach the status of a full-fledged state with its own state ideology. As a nation they only had their own intelligentsia, decimated or demoralized by the occupying power several times in a century. Even in the Soviet republic, that strongly resembled a room with curved mirrors, Belarusians owe it to their intelligentsia, that they learned to call identify themselves as Belarusians, their native language as Belarusian, and their greatest representatives — such as the poets Kupala and Kolas.

It is true that the urban Belarusians do not speak Russian, but a jargon. While on the surface it resembles Russian, this non-descript language performs purely technical communication functions. It is not supported by its own cultural traditions. This is why we cannot feel and call it our mother tongue. Thus many Belarusians experience only the beginning of the speaking process – like a typical early toddler. Just like children, they are learning to walk and cognize the world and push the envelope of independence.

As children, they depend absolutely on their father - the leader, and just like children, they may sometimes exhibit petulance and contrariness to parental figures. As the analogy may be applied to civic matters, this happened with Kiebic in the presidential elections of 1994. This will probably happen with Lukashenka, too. Belarusians are not yet capable of expressing an affirmative. Yet, on the other hand, they know how to decidedly express the negative. This partially explains the fact that our politicians have trouble finding a "worthy replacement" for Lukasenka.

The politicians also behave like children. They keep saying that the people will not support a party candidate; yet naively they don't seem to understand that such an attitude creates the atmosphere which spoils their own "party". By September 2001 most will not yet be able to vote "for" somebody. The nation is simply lagging behind the behavior anticipated by some impatient politicians. The electorate isn't grown-up enough yet to make a reasoned selection.

Belarusians do not know their history. They haven't grown up to reading history books. Let them grow up, and they will learn with satisfaction all about their ancestors from The Grand Duchy of Litva. Today it is too early to expect this kind of appreciation from them.

The stature of Belarusians regarding private property (children don't really have any), making decisions (a child really does not decide), or with regard to sex, for instance ("We have no sex !") precisely resembles that of children.

We are referring here not to the entire population or to all citizens of Belarus but precisely to Belarusians as a nation whose youth and flowering will take place only in the 21st century. Every living language is expanding and any vibrant language demands respect and love. However this rule does not apply to "narkomauka"*. The Belarusian language, cannot thrive while it carries the imprints of the 1933 reform — thus having been emasculated.

During the last decade of the 20th century the classical version of Belarusian has been experiencing a strong revival. This is testimony to the rising nation; since to a large degree the language revival process has been natural and spontaneous, not created by private or corporate initiative.

The Internet — today's most open intellectual and information forum is the best place to observe this spontaneity. It appears that 90% of Belarusian-speaking Internet participants use the classical "taraškievica"** Belarusian. In turn this expansion of classical Belarusian indicates a healthy potential for the wider use of the native language in the society at large.

Belarusians have not yet "arrived" in the cities. This is apparent in the lack of typical human characters, specific to individual Belarusian cities. We cannot identify a typical inhabitant of Miensk, Horadnia or Homiel, as we can in other national urban centers of other countries such as Moscow, Warsaw or Prague. Belarus developed very typical human characters in the countryside — but in today's world the city displays the character of a nation. Most likely, the most radical solution of this problem would be to transfer the capital to a smaller city, more Belarusian in character. Examples of such a transfer exist throughout the world: Washington, D.C.; Ottawa, Canada; Astana, Kazakhstan, proving the importance of this type of solution.

The 21st century promises to be favorable to us. It means that the child will mature and acquire a clearer understanding of itself and its place in the future. Right now its understanding of concepts is quite confused. For example it cannot determine whether it is ruled by a dictatorship or by a foreign occupation. True enough, right now only politicians are worried about this issue. The rest of the population practically does not perceive neither the dictator nor the occupier — only what comes at the end of the hand.

It is not the child's fault that it is little and does not behave like the adults. When observing a child learning to walk and speak, it is not wise to predict the demise of a nation and its language.

Today it is already apparent that our dear child is getting brighter. It is bidding farewell to the myth of communism and becoming less gullible. Looking at our nation, we experience the same feelings as looking at a child: worry, joy and a readiness to spring into action at any moment.

NOTES:

* The Russified version of Belarusian orthography and grammar, imposed by the language reform of 1933. Since then it has been used in official press and publications.

** Taraškievica, the classical version of Belarusian, allows a more accurate rendering of Belarusian phonetics (as opposed to the Russified official version).

[*Source*: *Naša Niva*, January 3, 2001]

BELARUS' FORUM

Force Used Against Peaceful Freedom's Day Demonstration on March 25

By Natalya Radina

A few dozen peaceful protesters were arrested March 25 in central Minsk. People came to celebrate the Freedom Day and got detained. The arrests were carried out under personal supervision of the country's Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov. The authorities again manifested their fear before the traditional public actions of protest. Eyewitnesses claim that there were 2-3 law-enforcers per one dissenter.

The rally got started at 12.00 on the Independence Square. The action organizer was the Belarusian Liberation Movement, representing 200 females and pensioners, who took to the streets to mark the Freedom Day. Unfortunately, police didn't let them march along Skaryna Prospect sidewalks. In the subway underpass they faced 30 armed law-enforcers that obstructed their way at the Independence Square. The authorities ruled to close the subway station for a while and the trolleybuses would also skip the Independence Square stop. Finally, the Belarusian Liberation Movement, and the Conservative Christian Party (CDP) that joined them, moved toward the Oktyabrskaya Square to hold final meeting there. There the crowd faced country's Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov who ordered them to go home. It took the marchers a few minutes to reach the GUM store where it encountered a cordon of 100 law-enforcers. Minister Naumov and his deputy Glukhovsky urged the CDP BPF leader Belenki to cease an unsanctioned procession, saying that "otherwise he would put people in danger and there'd be victims." Belenki immediately called off the assembly, telling people to leave the place. But the crowd didn't move. This infuriated the minister and he started yelling at Belenki in anger, ordering him to go directly to the police station. He obeyed the order but in some rather strange way — he boarded a trolleybus and headed to the police headquarters on his own since police refused to take him there in their own vehicle. In fact, that was the end of the first action on the Freedom Day. The people strolled in the downtown for a while and walked away.

An hour later, another BPF wing, "Adradzenne," gathered its 5,000 people on the Yubileynaya Square. The underpasses were blocked by police patrols and the Square was controlled by the interior forces. While the people were standing, not knowing how to break through heavy police cordons, the Youth Front staged a small skit and burnt down a Russian flag. At last the five-thousand strong crowd decided to pull out. The folks didn't dare to move toward the Svaboda Square which was cordoned off by cops. So they hurried in the direction of Bangalor Square, followed by numerous police buses and minivans, filled with special police units. Police kept addressing the crowd through the loudspeakers: "Get off the motorway! Stop blocking the traffic!" Police almost attacked the Mercedes of the country's Prime Minister Vladimir Ermoshin, who was on the way to do some shopping at the nearby store in the company of his bodyguards. At seeing the rally, the premier jumped inside his costly vehicle and sped off. Seeing Ermoshin's car pulling away from the place, the people decided not to march all the way to the Bangalor Square and made a turn to the Masherova Prospect. Despite warnings of Minister Naumov and of his aide Glukhovsky, who approached the dissenters, grabbed a few of them and hollered in their faces to stop resisting and leave the scene. Nonetheless, the marchers reached the monument on the Masherova Prospect. The site around the monument got immediately circled by law-enforcers with rubber clubs, gripped tightly in their hands.

There were around 15-20 buses, not counting a few dozen police cars. That's where the manhunt started. They beat people with truncheons, kicked with military boots and dragged them inside the buses. This was happening before the very eyes of women and children who were screaming and crying. They captured anyone who got in their way, including a few teenage girls and one elderly lady, whom the crowd managed to free. They also applied brutal force against the *"Nasha Svaboda"* photographer Vladimir Shlapak, who's now limping. One of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee reporters claims that he saw them beat people in their buses too. Overall there have been detained a few dozen people, the most prominent among them — Ludmila Gryaznova, Vintsuk Vyachorka, Ales Belyatsky, Pavel Severinets and the underage granddaughter of Valery Schukin. At the moment all these people are held in police custody. Police spokesmen refuse to tell us anything they know about their detention conditions. Press people aren't allowed into the building.

. The Freedom Day was celebrated throughout the country: in Hrodno, Brest, Homel and Baranovichi, where opposition held meetings and disseminated flyers. Some 2,000 took to the streets in Hrodno, 10 were arrested in Brest in a follow-up to the unsanctioned protest. [Charter 97 Press Center, March 25, 2001]

Who Will be Held Responsible for The Missing Ones?

That's the main headline of the special issue of *"Nasha Svaboda"* newspaper, circulated these days throughout Belarus. The newspaper is being passed out free of charge in central Minsk. It contains materials about prominent people, who vanished off the street over the past couple of years, monologues of their loved ones, attempts to analyze the situation around the disappearance cases.

WHY DID GENNADY KARPENKO DIE?

Mysterious death on April 6, 1999 of the most likely opposition candidate for the presidency shocked Belarusians. They couldn't believe in a sudden death of this relatively young politician. Investigation of the circumstances and analysis of the details of Gennady Dmitrievich's last day of life all prove that his death was anything but accidental.

Gennady Karpenko passed away at 7 o'clock April 6 in the 9th clinics. He was placed there on March 31, diagnosed with "brain hemorrhage". On April 1 he was operated upon unconscious in the reanimation department of the hospital.

The very last day of his life Gennady Karpenko was in great mood and held a few meetings. A couple of hours before the lethal attack he met with two strangers, who introduced themselves as "employees of Luzhkov's administration". Later it turned out that there are no such people in Moscow mayor's encirclement.

Gennady Karpenko fainted a few hours after that in the office of his second cousin Leonid Koshel. By the way, Koshel himself has been arrested and is now held in one of Minsk jails. His daughter abruptly died at the age of 27. Is it yet another strange coincidence?

WHERE'S YURI ZAKHARENKO?

Back in 1996 Yuri Zakharenko was dismissed from his post as a person, who disagrees with the president's viewpoints and policy. Former Home Minister enjoyed wide popularity among his colleagues. In late 1998 he, alongside with other army and police officers, launched the Belarusian Officers' Union.

Yuri Zakharenko was abducted near his own house on May 7, 1999. The eye-witnesses confirm that Zakharenko was forcefully driven away by a few men.

Yuri Zakharenko's wife Olga said that her husband called her at around 9 P.M. and told her that he'll be home in a minute. Since then no one heard of him. That same night Olga called police, but the legal proceedings were opened only 6 months after the incident. So far, the detectives presented no results of their work.

WHERE ARE VIKTOR GONCHAR AND ANATOLY KRASOVSKY?

13th Supreme Soviet Vice-Speaker Viktor Gonchar disappeared off the street in Minsk on September 16, 1999, together with a friend of his, businessman Anatoly Krasovsky. The scenario of their abduction was quite similar to the kidnapping of Yuri Zakharenko. Gonchar and Krasovsky made a phone call home, saying that they'll be back soon. Later police only found bloodstains and broken glass on the place of abduction - Fabrichnaya street.

Relatives and friends of Viktor Gonchar and Anatoly Krasovsky are convinced that the present-day authorities orchestrated the murder of another two of their opponents.

WHERE IS DMITRY ZAVADSKY?

July 7, 2000 Belarusian ORT correspondent Dmitry Zavadsky arrived in the "Minsk-2" airport to meet his colleague - journalist Pavel Sheremet. Upon his flight's departure, Sheremet ran into Zavadsky's empty car, parked nearby. Since then there's been no news about Zavadsky's whereabouts.

Investigation proceedings on Dmitry's disappearance case are covered with similar cloak of secrecy as other disappearance cases: neither procuracy nor KGB have revealed any information they possess.

However, on Nov.20, 2000 independent newspapers received an e-mail from one of the KGB agents, shedding light on the course of investigation procedures. The letter read that Dmitry Zavadsky had been murdered and police already discovered the place, where his body is buried; however they didn't carry out an autopsy due to the interference of the president and his Security service.

The author of the letter also noted that police captured 9 people, suspected of the murder. Five of them are current officers of the president's Security service, two -former "Almaz" fighter and two Chechen nationals. A week after the appearance of the letter they dismissed Security Council chief Sheiman (appointed Prosecutor general), KGB chief Matskevich and Prosecutor general Bozhelko.

WHO WILL ANSWER FOR THE MISSING PEOPLE?

Three months have passed since the moment of scandalous dismissals in the country's security services. In late November Lukashenko fired head of the Security Council Sheiman, KGB chief Matskevich and Prosecutor general Bozhelko. What was the root-cause for these dismissals? Lack of progress in investigating the disappearance cases? Or may be constant information leaks from the security services on these cases? This way or the other these events reflect broken lives, sorrow and tears. Also the tears of the children of the disappeared people. Those people, who either openly spoke against arbitrariness and lawlessness of the present-day authorities or were simply honestly doing their job.

"People's government" at gunpoint

In the beginning of 1999 "Narodnaya Volya" newspaper conducted a survey among its readers - what's your vision of the future government. Almost every participant mentioned the names of Karpenko, Zakharenko and Gonchar, proposing them for different posts in the government. Practically all those elected into the alternative government of free Belarus fell victim of harassment and persecution soon after:
- Gennady Karpenko died under mysterious circumstances; - Mikhail Chigir faced legal action, served a few months in jail; his family members were also persecuted; - Andrei Sannikov was beaten up by the RNE neo-Nazis, secretly supported by the government; - Vassily Leonov was sentenced to and spent a couple of years in prison; - Bogdankevich, Lebedko. Khodyko and other opposition leaders are constantly harassed. They can't get a job, many faced numerous fines and administrative arrests.

Alexander Lukashenko: "Hold me responsible for what is happening in the country"

General Zakharenko tops the list of the missing oppositionists. Investigation into his disappearance case is underway at the moment. However, police possess no new data on him. Strange as it may sound, but the eye-witnesses of the abduction were found by the public commission for locating Yuri Zakharenko, rather than by the law-enforcers.

People were found, who saw the scene of abduction, and even described the outward appearance of the ones involved. The official investigation crew never took their testimonies serious.

In a private conversation with the ex-Minister's daughter Elena, the investigator said that the case is political.

Procuracy sent a letter to KGB, asking them to provide the results of their surveillance over Zakharenko. KGB responded with a statement that the documentation had been lost.

All these facts show that the authorities don't want to locate the general. What's the reason for this sabotage?

Yuri Zakharenko sought to unite all sound forces in the Belarusian secret services. His activities on the formation of the Belarusian Officers' Union were going at full force - many refused to tolerate the fact that police was ordered to persecute peaceful protesters and all those dissatisfied with the regime's policy. The danger of BOU for the ruling elite couldn't have been overestimated. In winter 1999 the general called upon the secret services not to support the illegitimate president Lukashenko.

Lukashenko himself said literally the following in his speech at the end of 1999:

- ...I had no stronghold then, and I knew that, sooner or later, especially after the dismissal of Yuri Zakharenko and his attempts to launch a power-structure within the opposition... Or you are unaware of that?... Now they are claiming in unison that Lukashenko is to blame... If so, let me tell them the following, in order to relieve journalists' fears over all these scandalous crimes - yes, I'm guilty that this happened in the country. Because I'm the president. And stop looking for guilty ones. I bear full responsibility for this and other incidents."

Where's Gonchar?

Vice-Speaker of the Supreme Soviet Viktor Gonchar was exposed to harsh pressure from the very beginning of his opposition activities. Let us recollect his arbitrary arrest in March 1999, which ended in ten-day imprisonment. When in jail Viktor Iosiphovich refused to accept food or water. Finally, two days before the official term expired, they secretly took him out, placed into their vehicle and threw out into the snow without outer clothing a few blocks away from his house.

In May 1999 Gonchar, as stipulated by the Constitution, initiated alternative presidential election campaign. The campaign was disrupted by the authorities. In July 1999 Viktor Gonchar declared that president Lukashenko officially ran out of his mandate. Up to the present day the regime didn't receive international recognition.

The very course of the investigation procedures testifies to the government's involvement in the abduction of Gonchar and Krasovsky. Just as in the incident with Yuri Zakharenko, the witnesses and evidence of the kidnapping were discovered by the relatives of the missing ones. They found pieces of car glass and bloodstains. Police, which they called for, carried away all their findings for an expertise. That's where the investigation came to a standstill.

Lukashenko, state officials and official mass media have numerously verbally abused the disappeared oppositionists. BT reported that they went into hiding on the territory of Russia or even immigrated abroad. The families of the missing persons are under constant police surveillance - they are being watched by secret services.

"Journalist's case" revealed the mystery of the series of disappearances

July 2000. "Minsk-2" airport. Empty car, belonging to Dmitry Zavadsky -someone even erased fingerprints. The disappearance of a journalist, who had nothing to do with politics, disclosed the involvement of the top security service agents in the abductions of humans.

Data on the case were coming in small pieces, even the journalists dared not publicize it upon the request of the investigation crew. Months passed and the situation remained deadlocked. The main question - where's Dmitry? - was left unanswered.

On the seventieth day since the moment of his friend's disappearance Pavel Sheremet ran a press-conference. He accused Belarusian secret services and personally Alexander Lukashenko of orchestrating this crime.

It turned out that the key suspect on the matter was an officer of "Almaz" riot police, a leader of the Belarusian neo-Nazi RNU branch Valery Ignatovich, arrested on charges of numerous murders. The investigators are inclined to think that the killing of Zavadsky was an act of retribution for Dmitry's filming Ignatovich during his voyage to Chechnya, where the latter fought against Russians.

But in reality things were more complicated. As deemed by the journalists, Ignatovich, being a psychologically sick person, couldn't work out such a sophisticated plan of abducting Zavadsky only to take revenge on him. Ignatovich became a death tool in hands of his bloodthirsty bosses. Other suspects were agents of the president's security services and "Almaz" guerilla. May be that's the reason why in late 2000 Lukashenko appointed former "Almaz" commander, chief of Lukashenko's secret service Vladimir Naumov country's new Minister for the Interior. He was called to destroy the data on the involvement of his former subordinates in the bloody affairs. But it was too late to hide away the truth.

Judging by the escalating tensions around Zavadsky's case the secret services were at real war: procuracy investigators and KGB, which were in charge of Zavadsky's case, were subject to threats and beatings.

After multiple information leaks the public learned about the previously concealed facts: the place, where Zavadsky's body was buried, spade with stains of blood, identified as his and the involvement of agents from various security services to the murder.

Information leaks provoked series of dismissals among the country's top law-enforcers. November 27, 2000 Lukashenko sacked KGB chief Matskevich, Security Council head Sheiman and Prosecutor general Bozhelko.

Lukashenko got rid of Matskevich and Bozhelko, who could've named the abductors of Zavadsky - officers of the presidential security service and "Almaz". The case files were automatically handed over to Naumov (former security service chief, ex-commander of "Almaz") and new KGB chair Erin (also former security service chief).

Lukashenko couldn't leave such devoted person as Sheiman out of business. The procuracy employees aren't too happy about their new boss, who graduated from the Blagoveschensk Tank School, has no lawyer's education, being mostly engaged in political ideology. But Lukashenko's closest friend and companion knows too much. It is believed that Sheiman was in charge of all different secret and scandalous issues - beginning from the "assassination attempt" against candidate Lukashenko in 1994 and ending with the arms trade with the "third world countries".

Of course, the above said in no wise relates to all those employed in police or KGB. It is the minority, involved in dirty political orders and racketeering, who discredit and compromise the rest. Undoubtedly, dissatisfaction with such policies will continue in future. Even now inside secret services some feel opposed to the regime. This practice may reach its culminating point at the most crucial moment and speed up the destruction of the regime, as far as the regime counts on blind subordination. History knows many examples. This will certainly happen here one day, no matter whether some of us wear military uniforms or civilian clothes.

Data on the disappearance of ORT cameraman Dmitry Zavadsky and opposition politician Viktor Gonchar!

I am a police officer working for the KGB of the Republic of Belarus. In view of some clear reasons I cannot tell you my name or position, that I occupy. The information that I possess is of paramount importance. Lives and destiny of many people depend on how quickly this information will be publicized.

Unfortunately, I'm quite limited in my reporting of the facts, because there's a short number of KGB agents and officers who enjoy access to secret files. My mentioning of more detailed data may result in more unjustified human casualties.

The General Procuracy and the KGB were entitled to

investigate into the case of Dmitry Zavadsky's disappearance. The findings that we came across in course of the investigation procedures placed great pressure on the detectives on behalf of the Security Council, as well as provoked confrontation between KGB and President's Security Service. KGB found track of the criminals after they captured Ignatovich, former officer of "Almaz" special unit. Ignatovich was arrested under different charges, as he had been fighting in Chechnya on separatists' side. During the investigation he recalled a couple of names of Belarusian army officers, who used to train the Chechen guerilla. After their arrest the detectives proved the Chechen version of abduction. At the moment they arrested 9 suspects on Zavadsky's case, believed to have orchestrated the abduction. Five of them are acting officers of President's Security Service, two others - its former agents, one - former "Almaz" special unit fighter and two more - Chechen nationals.

The suspects confessed to the murder of Dmitry Zavadsky and pointed to an exact location in a forest near Minsk, where they buried his body. The investigators found the spade with blood stains on it. The medical expertise proved it to be the blood of Dmitry Zavadsky.

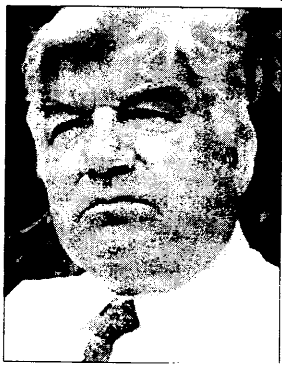
However, no exhumation has been carried out. The Security Council and President forbade it.

[*Source:* Charter '97 Press Center, FILE /// 2001, March 101]

WE OPPOSE VIOLENCE

Or What was discussed at the seminar in Vilnia
By Siamion Šarecki

January 26-31, 2001 a seminar entitled "Nonviolent struggle and democratic processes in Belarus" was held in Vilnia (Lithuania). It was organized by the Lithuanian Human Rights Foundation headed by the human rights activist Stasys Kaušynis and the former Lithuanian parliament member Audrus Butkevičius. Lectures were presented by Prof. Gene Sharp, director of the Einstein Institute (USA)_



Siamion Šarecki

The Einstein Institute conducts research of and propagates nonviolent methods of struggle for freedom and democracy. Its members have extensive experience in conducting similar seminars in many countries. They have published textbooks on nonviolent methods of struggle against dictatorial regimes. In 1991 the Institute advised the Sajudis leaders in Lithuania as well as democratic activists in Latvia and Estonia during their struggle for independence. A book by Prof. Sharp entitled "Civic Defense" was published in Lithuania in 1992.

The classic example of nonviolent struggle against foreign aggressors is the Gandhi doctrine and its concept of "stubbornness in truth". The doctrine is based on the "laws of love and suffering" and the abstinence from self-indulgence. It opposes revolutionary transformations of society and the expropriation of "exploiting classes." Mahatma Gandhi was advocating the "moralization" of political activities. Main features of his struggle against the British imperialism were non-cooperation and the support for the development of everything native. Albert Einstein also believed that "we all should strive to act in Gandhi's spirit, and not use violence in defense of our interests."

One of the main political characteristics exhibited by the rulers of Grand Duchy of Litva was their skill in solving political problems "without noise nor violence", as described in 1897 by the Russian scholar Alexander Kacubinski in his article "Territory of historical Lithuania". Andrej Volan, a well-known Belarusian jurist of the Renaissance period expressed similar ideas: " Whenever the people's rage is given free reign — so that they do to others whatever they please — then the society and state cease to exist, giving way to a gang of robbers or a pack of mad dogs, where everyone bites anyone." According to Volan "We should approve what is moral."

Chancellor Leu Sapieha of the Grand Duchy of Litva — that outstanding statesman and thinker — also adhered to these principles. In his letter to Jozafat Kuncevič he stressed that "no one was ever able to hold on to power for any length of time, if the power was directed against the people." Leu Sapieha also said: "Doing evil leads to one's own destruction."

All this indicated that the seed of nonviolent methods of struggle, planted during the seminar with Belarusian politicians, found fertile soil prepared for many centuries.

One should also note that the seminar was very topical on the eve of presidential elections. The dictatorial regime ruling the country is actively preparing for these elections, and so is the democratic opposition.

The regime is most afraid of the methods of nonviolent struggle and openness - just as mold is afraid of sunlight. In contrast, they are the main weapons of the democratic opposition. During the seminar in Vilnia representatives of the Belarusian opposition attempted to master these methods. During the six day workshop, approximately 40 Belarusian politicians attempted and analyzed 24 features of the nonviolent struggle.

Prof. Sharp stressed that the principles of non-cooperation and insubordination often provide the main impetus toward the overturn of powerful rulers and their regimes. The methods of nonviolence strike the "Achilles heel" of dictatorial regimes. All governments depend on the support of the governed nation and society; when the population suspends its cooperation with the dictator or aggressor, the potential of the violence apparatus — the mainstay of many governments — is greatly reduced. Without this apparatus the rulers' power weakens and eventually ceases to exist.

This is exactly why the Belarusian dictator and his cohorts raised such ruckus about the Vilnia seminar. However, this raises another question: if the dictator is supported by the people — as he and his followers claim — then why is he afraid of the nonviolent methods by the opposition? Most likely he himself feels the loss of people's support. On the other hand, the opposition believes that its path to power should be based on the support by the broad masses of people. In general, it does not perceive the use of violent methods in political contention. History shows that politicians' attempts to gain or to hold on to power by means of violence will sooner or later lead to the creation of another dictatorial regime. Republic Belarus is no exception: after initiating in November of 1996 a coup d'etat by means of violence and other anti-constitutional measures, the dictator created such a regime. Moreover, the ethnic, mostly Russian composition of the present regime in Belarus indicates that it does not have any roots of support in Belarusian society. This is why it is afraid of mass actions of protest.

During the analysis of issues the participants had the opportunity to express their own ideas and judgment. They watched videotapes of nonviolent struggle, as it was used during the overthrow of dictatorial regimes in South Africa, Chile and Poland. The lectures were delivered behind closed doors; special press conferences were organized for the journalists.

Mr. Šarecki is the chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet (Council) of the Republic Belarus — the only internationally recognized Belarusian parliament (forcibly dissolved in 1996)

The Role of the Russian Language In a Democratic Belarus

Excerpts from a lecture by Aleh Trusaŭ, president of the Belarusian Language Society, delivered at the 3rd Congress of Belarusists in December 2000.

After the ill-fated referendum of 1995, Russian again became an official language in Belarus. Despite its formal equality with Belarusian, Russian immediately and rapidly began to force out the Belarusian language from all spheres of life, especially from education and mass information media.

Despite the strong resistance of the Belarusian intelligentsia, this trend continues. This is why it is necessary for us to be well acquainted with the history of the Russian language – its origin, formation, and its influence on the mentality of Belarus' inhabitants, regardless of their ethnic, social or religious status.

Thus, a little from history.... Reading the article "Russian language" on p. 459 of the "Belarusian Language Encyclopedia" (1994 edition), one learns interesting details. The author informs us that the break-up of the original Slavic ethno-linguistic unity resulted in the formation of three kindred language groups: the Eastern (ancient Russian nationality), the Western (Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Lusatians, Pomorian Slavs), and the Southern (Bulgarians, Slovenians, Croatians, Serbs, Macedonians) – each with its own linguistic characteristics. Thus, a question immediately arises: why was there no common Western or Southern Slavic language, while the Eastern group needed one, despite its much larger area of settlement?

One concludes that our historians and philologists should have long ago discarded the mythical "ancient Russian" ethnicity, invented and imposed on us by the pseudo-scholars of the Russian empire. Ukrainians have done so already.

The encyclopedia further states that the "ancient Russian" or common Eastern Slavic language existed from the 7th through the 14th centuries -- a full 700 years! This is another contradiction; the original ethnic Russian territory was not settled by Slavs until the 11-12th centuries. Before that time, it was inhabited by Finno-Ugric tribes, whose languages had nothing in common with Slavs.

According to the encyclopedia, the Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian languages were established simultaneously in the 15th century, but the encyclopedia does not supply any solid proof for this proposition, most likely, because such proof does not exist. This issue really demands a thorough study since, in the 14th-16th centuries, Belarusians and Ukrainians lived within the boundaries of the same state – the Grand Duchy of Litva (Lithuania). Therefore, their languages could not have developed the same way as Russian within the boundaries of the Duchy of Moscow, a vassal state of the Golden Horde.

The encyclopedia also ignores the languages of the Novgorod and Pskov ethnic groups, that developed for a certain period of time independently of Moscow and reached their zenith in the 14th-15th centuries, before being conquered by Moscow.

In my opinion, the Belarusian language and Belarusian ethnos were formed considerably earlier than the 15th century (in the beginning of the 16th century, we had already produced the printed book). They were formed in the 12-13th centuries, when the annals ceased referring to individual Slavic tribes -- the ancestors of Belarusians. Moreover, as early as the second half of the 13th century, Belarusian had become the official language of the new state – the Grand Duchy of Litva, with its capital in Navahradak. The Belarusian language reached its highest point in the 15th century, when it also became the language of international relations.

In contrast, due to the southern Slavic influence, the Russian language at the end of the 14th century began to acquire an archaic, pompous and solemn style, very different from the judicial, chancellory and diplomatic style of the Belarusian language of that period.

In the 17th century, the Russian language evolved on the basis of the Moscow dialect, considered exemplary. At the same time, however, this dialect exhibited many borrowings from Old Belarusian, especially in the building trade.

The inhabitants of ethnic Belarusian lands had their first contact with the Russian language during the war of 1654-1677, when most of our territory was temporarily occupied by Russian armies. This period also brought about the first compulsory mass resettlement of Belarusians to the Duchy of Moscow, and to the city of Moscow itself, where Belarusians established the Miaščanskaja Słabada quarter and comprised up to 30% of the city's population.

The 18th century represented a turning point in the existence of both languages. In the Grand Duchy of Litva, after 1696, Polish became the only official language, and the Belarusian written language entered a period of decline. At the same time, in the Russian empire, due to the efforts of Karamzin and Lomonosov, Russian became the language of science and of the state apparatus, and thus received a strong impetus for its further development. After the violent partition of the Polish-Litvanian state in 1795, Russian became the official language in the entire Belarusian ethnic territory, which had become incorporated into the Russian empire.

During the 19th, and especially, the 20th centuries, the ethnic Belarusian population was regularly and by various means resettled to Russia, and Belarus was actively and purposefully settled by Russians – primarily in the large and medium-sized cities.

The highest number of Russian population in Belarus was reached in 1989, when according to the census, 1,342,000 Russians lived in Belarus. Due to the increased influence of Russian, 3,244,000 inhabitants of Belarus named Russian as their native language – compared with 2,688,000 in 1979. Out of this number, only 1,311,000 were ethnic Russians; the remaining 1,933,000 belonged to other ethnic groups of the former Soviet Union.

And only now, after Belarus has become an independent country, has the situation changed somewhat; the number of citizens who consider themselves Russians has decreased, and the number of nationally conscious Belarusians has increased.

In order to stop any further decline of the Belarusian language, and to restore its proper prestige in the coming century, our own and foreign historians and philologists should abandon old imperial and Soviet standards in defining the role of Russian in all spheres of life and activities in an independent and democratic Belarus. First of all, the myth of the exclusive role of Russian in Belarus – with its perceived messianic and pan-slavic functions – must be finally dislodged. At the same time, more attention should be paid to the study of, and the familiarization of the public with, the native languages of our neighbors – Ukrainians and Poles.

Secondly, we should define concrete limits for and the place of the Russian language in education, society, government, publishing activities, and in all types of information media.

A country where Belarusians constitute almost 82% of the population should have only one official language – that of the titular Belarusian nation.

The number of Russian-language state institutions should not exceed 15-20%, based on the proportion of ethnic Russian population, and on the number of citizens who are not of Belarusian descent and speak Russian regularly.

Belarusian-language public schools, beginning in the first grade, should provide instruction in one of the European languages: English, German, French, Spanish or Italian. In addition, beginning in the 5th grade, parents and their children should be able to select one more Slavic tongue: Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian.... Compulsory teaching of Russian should be prohibited as an outmoded feature of the imperial Soviet system. Undoubtedly, today, most students would probably select Russian. However, there may be many interested in learning one of the other Slavic languages.

Students of specialized middle schools and of the higher educational institutions should also have the right to select the study of one of the three Slavic languages of our neighbors.

The entire territory of Belarus should be open to production and distribution of books, periodicals, video and audio recordings in the languages of all neighboring countries – not only in Russian. All citizens of our country should be able to watch Polish and Ukrainian TV programs, along with those produced in Russian.

ECONOMY

Minsk Tries Again to Get IMF to Cough up Money

The IMF has resumed consultations with Belarus, though it has not committed to lending funds before Minsk demonstrates further efforts to reform its economic policies (BelaPAN, February 20). Talks in February focused on the preconditions for a six-month monitoring program, which is slated to begin on April 1. Should this program be concluded successfully, discussion concerning a possible future standby credit facility would begin in earnest.

The Fund has established three preconditions for the six-month monitoring program: (1) administrative controls on price increases for 80 percent of goods are to be removed, (2) the provision of "soft" credits via commercial banks for agriculture and construction is to be halted, and (3) state budget expenditures are to be reduced and some tax exemptions eliminated to finance a scheduled across the board wage increase. Should the IMF executive board approve the monitoring program and should Minsk meet these preconditions, the monitoring program would specify concrete monetary and fiscal policy targets.

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who is facing re-election in September, has called on the government to increase the average monthly wage to US$100. The IMF has proposed accomplishing this by increasing budget revenues through cutting non-core expenditures and by rescinding tax exemptions since the tax rates in Belarus are already high. The government has agreed to this in principle, and in exchange claims that it is willing to abide by targets for fiscal and monetary policies, as well as for foreign exchange reserves, that would be set by an IMF team. The government has also agreed in principle to accelerate privatization of small and medium-sized businesses. And it has even agreed to limit the issuance of presidential decrees which have in the past interfered with business transactions.

The government and the National Bank have made similar promises in the past, however, and little has come of them. The IMF's cautious approach--according to which Belarus must implement IMF conditions before any funds are disbursed--clearly reflects previous experience. In light of Belarus' upcoming presidential elections, skepticism about Minsk's commitment to honoring these pledges must run particularly high--especially since President Lukashenka and government officials continue to publicly criticize market reform. On the other hand, Minsk did reduce fulfill its promise to unify and devalue the official exchange rate last year, and tighter monetary policies have helped bring year-on-year consumer price inflation down to 91 percent in January, compared to 244 percent in January 2000. Belarus' reluctant and piecemeal approach to market reform seems likely to continue to delay macroeconomic stabilization, thereby increasing the overall costs of this transition (Western agencies, February 15, 20).

Monitor, March 5, 2001 - Volume VII, Issue 44.

BELARUSIANS ABROAD

Belarusian Americans Mark 83rd Anniversary Of Belarusian Independence Declaration

On March 18, 2001, the Belarusian American Community of New York and New Jersey celebrated the 83rd anniversary of the proclamation of independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. The observance was held in the Ukrainian National Home in Manhattan, New York, and was attended by over one hundred people. The gathering was addressed by Ivonka Survilla, President of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic; John L. Armstrong, Belarusian Desk of the US Department of State; Anton Shukieloyts, National Chairman of the Belarusian American Association (BAA); Zianon Pazniak, leader of the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front; Peter Zalmaev of the International League of Human Rights ; Dr. Vitaut Kipel and Dr. Jan Zaprudnik of the Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences.

Rudolph W. Giuliani, Mayor of the City of New York, issued a proclamation designating the day of March 25, 2001, as "Belarusian Independence Day." Likewise, the Governors of the State of New York and the State of Illinois declared the 25th of March as the Belarusian Independence day in their states. Written greetings were received from Siamion Sharetski, Chairman of the 13th Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus; the writer Vasil Bykau ; Belarusian Congress Committee of America; Federal Council of Belarusian Organizations in Australia; Belarusian Coordinating Committee of Chicago, Illinois' and the Union of Belarusians of the World "Backauscyna." ("Homeland")

The main theme of the speakers and the written messages was the support for the struggle that goes on in Belarus, and outside its borders, for the establishment of freedom and democracy in that country, proclaimed by the constituent charters of the Belarusian Democratic Republic 83 years ago on March 25, 1918 .

The audience also listened to Belarusian songs and the recitals of poetry. Those in attendance had an opportunity to admire an exhibit of Belarusian folk costumes as well as buy new Belarusian books and music on CDs and cassettes.

The observance was held under the aegis of the Belarusian American Association. The organizational committee consisted of Mrs. Jula Andrusyshyn, Mrs. Vera Bartul, Mrs. Alla Kuzmitskaya, Dr. Alla Orsa-Romano and Mrs. Valentyna Jakimovich. Songs were performed by Dzimitry Yautukhovich and Raisa Pakrounaya. Poems were recited by Mrs. Irena Zylinskaya-Cupryk, Ksenya Kapytka and Nelia Rzheuskaya. (JZ)

Following is the text of the Belarusian Independence Day proclamation by New York Mayor Giuliani.

Office of the Mayor
CITY OF NEW YORK

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS: BELARUSAN INDEPENDENCE DAY IS CELEBRATED ON MARCH 25TH BY THE BELARUSAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN NEW YORK CITY AND PEOPLE OF BELARUSAN DESCENT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. THE BELARUSAN AMERICAN ASSOCIATION, FOUNDED IN 1949, IS CELEBRATING THE 83RD ANNIVERSARY OF THE BELARUS NATIONAL REPUBLIC WITH A COMMEMORATION AND DINNER. THE ASSOCIATION ALSO HOSTS EVENTS THAT SHARE THE RICH BELARUSAN HERITAGE WITH ALL NEW YORKERS; AND

WHEREAS: IN 980 AD, PRINCE RAHVALOD ISSUED THE FIRST WRITTEN DOCUMENT OF BELARUSAN STATEHOOD, AS THE POLACAK PRINCIPALITY. THE CAPITAL, MINSK, WAS FOUNDED IN 1067. FROM THE 13TH TO THE 16TH CENTURY THE AND GRAND DUCHY OF LITVA CONSISTED OF THE PRESENT BELARUS AND OTHER TERRITORIES. THE STATE LANGUAGE WAS BELARUSAN. IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY, BELARUS WAS INCORPORATED INTO THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE. AFTER VARIOUS UPRISINGS, ON MARCH 25, 1918, THE BELARUSAN NATIONAL REPUBLIC WAS PROCLAIMED, WITH A TEMPORARY CONSTITUTION GUARANTEEING THE RIGHT TO VOTE; FREEDOM OF SPEECH, PRESS AND ASSEMBLY; THE RIGHT TO THE 8-HOUR WORKING DAY, AND THE RIGHT TO STRIKE. HOWEVER, ON JANUARY 1, 1919, THE BYELORUSSIAN SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC WAS CREATED, AND IT WAS NOT UNTIL AUGUST 25, 1991, THAT THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS DECLARED ITS INDEPENDENCE. TODAY THE PEOPLE OF BELARUS STILL STRUGGLE TO ATTAIN FULL DEMOCRACY AND

FREEDOM FROM OPPRESSION, AND TO RECOVER FROM THE TRAGIC EFFECTS OF THE NUCLEAR DISASTER AT CHERNOBYL. BELARUS ALSO HAS A DISTINGUISHED CULTURAL HISTORY. THERE ARE MANY FAMED CHURCHES AND CASTLES, AND THERE HAVE BEEN MANY FINE BELARUSAN WRITERS, POETS, AND MUSICIANS. IN 1517, DR. FRANCISHAK SKARYNA PUBLISHED THE BIBLE IN THE BELARUS LANGUAGE, FOLLOWING THE FIRST TWO EUROPEAN PRINTINGS IN GERMAN AND CZECH. MORE RECENTLY, THE ARTISTS MARC CHAGALL AND CHAIM SOUTINE WERE FROM BELARUS; AND

WHEREAS: THE FIRST BELARUSAN IMMIGRANTS SETTLED IN NEW YORK CITY IN THE 1890s AND TODAY TENS OF THOUSANDS OF NEW YORKERS OF BELARUSAN DESCENT CONTRIBUTE TO EVERY AREA OF THE LIFE OF OUR MULTIFACETED CITY,

NOW THEREFORE, I, RUDOLPH W. GIULIANI, MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, IN RECOGNITION OF THIS IMPORTANT ANNIVERSARY, DO HEREBY PROCLAIM SUNDAY, MARCH 25, 2001 IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK AS

"BELARUSAN INDEPENENCE DAY"

RUDOLPH W. GIULIANI MAYOR

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I HAVE HEREUNTO SET MY HAND AND CAUSED THE SEAL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK TO BE AFFIXED

The 3rd Constituent Charter Proclaiming Independence Of the Belarusian National Republic (BNR)

A year ago the peoples of Belarus, together with the peoples of Russia, threw off the yoke of Russian tsarism, which had oppressed Belarus most of all and, without asking the people, precipitated our land into the conflagration of war which totally destroyed Belarusian cities and villages. Now we, the Council (Rada) of the Belarusian National Republic, have cast off from our native land the last vestige of national dependence which the Russian tsars imposed by force upon our free and independent land. From this time on, the Belarusian National Republic is proclaimed an independent and free state. The peoples of Belarus themselves, under the aegis of their Constituent Assembly, shall determine the future national relations of Belarus.

By virtue of this, all former national relations lose their forcå relations which made it possible for a foreign government to sign the Treaty of Brest for Belarus, thus destroying the Belarusian people by partitioning their land.

By virtue of this, the government of the Belarusian National Republic will establish relations with interested parties by proposing to them a review of that part of the Treaty of Brest which concerns Belarus and the signing of peace treaties with all belligerent states.

The Belarusian National Republic should include all those lands where the Belarusian people constitute a numerical majority, namely: the Mahilou region, the Belarusian parts of the regions of Miensk, Horadnia (including the cities of Horadnia, Bielastok, and others), Vilnia, Viciebsk, Smalensk and Carnihau, as well as adjacent parts of neighboring gubernias, inhabited by Belarusians.

The Belarusian National Republic confirms all those rights and freedoms of the citizens and peoples of Belarus which were proclaimed by the Constituent Charter of March 9, 1918. Proclaiming the independence of the Belarusian National Republic, its council expresses the hope that all freedom-loving peoples will assist the Belarusian people to achieve fully their political and national ideals.

The Council (Rada) of the Belarusian Democratic Republic

Given in Belarusian Miensk
March 24, 1918

News from Prague

The "Day of Freedom" (March 25th) celebration

On March 24, 2001, Belarusians of the Czech Republic celebrated the 83rd anniversary of the proclamation of independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (B.N.R.)

The observance was held in the Mirror Chapel of the National Library in Prague. It was attended by over 100 people, including guests from Belarus and Lithuania: Prof. Siamion Šarecki, chairman of the 13th Supreme Council of the Republic Belarus, the well-known writer and historian Uładzimier Arłoŭ, the journalist Valancina Aksak, and the popular singer Viktar Šałkievič.

Following the address by Prof. Šarecki, the gathering heard the appeal of the President of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, Ms. Ivonka Survilla to the Belarusian people on the occasion of this holiday. Mr. Arłoŭ then delivered an interesting speech in which he recalled how he perceived the day of March 25th at various stages of his life. At the conclusion he read excerpts from his popular essay ,"Independence is when ..." (See text below)

Finally, Mr. Viktar Šałkievič from Horadnia (Belarus) staged a lively concert of his own, singing "ballads and romances" — some of patriotic nature, others folksy and humorous.

After the official part of the celebration, the attendees laid flowers at the memorial desk honoring Dr. Francišak Skaryna, located in the courtyard of the National Library. Dr. Skaryna — a legendary figure from Belarus' history — printed his Belarusian-language Bible in 1517 here in Prague.

Following the established tradition, the gathering then visited the Olšany Cemetery in Prague to honor the memory of Belarusians buried here: BNR presidents Piotra Krečeŭski and Vasil Zacharka , and the singer Michaś Zabejda-Sumicki.

** Independence is when ..... you first go to school and are taught in your own language, and your parents don't have to spend all summer collecting signatures for making school instruction in your own language possible.*

** Independence is when ..... nobody will scare you that your people will not survive without minerals, diamonds and the "elder brother". Then you'll understand that you don't have to feel sorry for the poor Dutch and Belgians who get along fine without these riches and without the "elder brother."*

** Independence is when ..... without any difficulties your father gets your birth certificate, stating that you were born and named Ryhor after your grandfather, and the official does not insist that the name Ryhor is not officially listed (the "human" name Grigorij is listed")*

** Independence is when ..... from cradle to grave you feel as a human being in your own country.*

SKARYNA Association Endorses Domaš

Members of the Belarusian-Czech Cultural Association Skaryna, convened on March 10, 2001, expressed their unanimous support of Mr. Siamion Domaš, one of the presidential candidates from the Belarusian democratic opposition.

The association's leadership was instructed to inform Belarusian independent media of this decision.

BELARUS' HALL of FAME



Ms. Irena Kalada-Smirnoū

By Alena Makoūskaja

It has been eight years since the charitable foundation "Ethnic Voice of America" began its work in the United States of America. It was established and is headed by our Belarusian countrywoman, Ms. Irena Kalada-Smirnoū of Cleveland, Ohio.

Ms. Irena was born in the village of Padkasoūje in the Navahradak district of Belarus. Fate brought her as a young girl to her new homeland across the ocean. Although starting a new life abroad was often difficult, Irena's family never broke its spiritual ties with Belarus, and together with other compatriots, maintained our national values in the country to which they emigrated.

A diaspora is an extension of a nation abroad, in foreign countries. Our diaspora has not severed its blood and spiritual ties with Belarus, despite the passage of time.

This is why in 1992, when Ms. Irena after many years visited her homeland, she perceived very painfully - as her personal sorrow - the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. She decided that helping Belarus is her duty. She picked up this Cross and has carried it since. Moreover, by founding the charitable foundation in the United States, she managed to find and gather around her like-minded people from various ethnic backgrounds who voluntarily and without pay come to work at the foundation in their free time.

At first, the foundation sent humanitarian assistance to Belarus. Later, it began bringing groups of children abroad for convalescence. Thanks to Ms. Irena and her co-workers, approximately 300 children from Belarus each year have the opportunity to rest and regain their health in Slovenia, Bulgaria and other countries. The foundation also helps individual families.

The foundation "Ethnic Voice of America" cooperates with several civic organizations in Belarus, including our World Association of Belarusians, "Baćkaūščyna." However, Ms. Irena and her colleagues are always open to cooperation with new partners — their main goal is to help Belarus and Belarusians.

The cooperation of "Baćkaūščyna" with the "Ethnic Voice of America" foundation dates to 1999, when Ms. Kalada-Smirnou helped us send a group of children for rest and convalescence to Turkey. In the same year, both organizations were asked to help Saša Hušča, a girl who suffered burns in a fire, and required multiple operations. Ms. Irena and her foundation responded immediately, and financed the girl's airfare and other needs.

With Ms. Irena's support, in the summer of 2000, our organization dispatched two groups for rest in Bulgaria. During our cooperation, we have suggested several versions of convalescence; Ms. Irena has always selected the best alternative, one that provided the Belarusian children the best: ecologically clean and vitamin-rich food, southern sun, real consideration of their needs, and cordial treatment by their hosts.

Moreover, Ms. Irena has always been interested in familiarizing the children with the customs and traditions of their host countries. Interesting excursions and sight-seeing trips have been organized for them.

Ms. Kalada-Smirnou has also been concerned about and supported us in other areas of endeavor. Due to the initiative of "Baćkaūščyna," a special committee has prepared the program "Belarus — 2000," the concepts of which were summarized in "The Word to Belarusians. The historical path of the Belarusian nation and state." This valuable material represents the work of many people and deserves to be published. Ms. Irena offered her help, and now, thanks to her support, we are preparing a book, "The historical path of the Belarusian nation and state," which is due to be published before the Third Congress of Belarusians of the World.

The life of Ms. Kalada-Smirnou, her understanding of the problems and difficulties of others, and her selfless work for the benefit of our homeland, are a shining example to be emulated by us all.

[*Source: Belarusian Digest,* January 2001]

NEWS BRIEFS

CHRONICLE of EVENTS

Jan. 16, 2001

LUKASHENKA'S CHALLENGER

Representatives of 24 Belarusian NGOs gathered in Minsk on 16 January to endorse Syamyon Domash as a candidate in this year's presidential elections, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Domash, who resigned the post of Hrodna Oblast governor to protest President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's handling of the 1996 constitutional referendum, leads the Regional Belarus association. Many in Belarus consider Domash, who is not affiliated with any political party, to be the best independent candidate. Domash said he is ready to withdraw his candidacy in favor of a contender with a better chance of beating Lukashenka. The Belarusian opposition is also pondering two other candidates to challenge Lukashenka: former Premier Mikhail Chyhir and trade union leader Uladzimir Hancharyk. "We will work in one team, it is not important who of us will be appointed [to run]," Domash pledged, referring to Chyhir and Hancharyk. (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 17)

February 5, 2001

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LAWMAKER RELEASED FROM PRISON

Uladzimir Kudzinau, a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation, was released from prison on 5 February, Belapan reported. Kudzinau received a seven-year prison sentence in August 1997 on charges of giving a bribe. Kudzinau denies his guilt, saying his case was fabricated as a reprisal for his involvement in the preparation of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's impeachment in 1996. Kudzinau's release became possible owing to amnesty and the introduction of a new Criminal Code stipulating milder punishment for bribery. Kudzinau told journalists he is going to actively participate in politics. "The authorities want to drive the Belarusian nation, which they call an opposition, into the 'legal field' they invented, while they are indulging in legal arbitrariness," he said. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 6)

February 14, 2001

BELARUSIAN YOUTH MARK VALENTINE'S DAY BETWEEN POLICE CORDONS.

Some 1,000 young people took part in a march to mark Valentine's Day in downtown Minsk, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 14 February. Participants in the march, which was organized by the opposition Youth Front, gave passing pedestrians Valentine cards, chanted anti-government slogans, and demanded democratic changes in the country. Police officers repeatedly reminded the participants that the city authorities had given permission to stage the demonstration at a different venue. "[Police] colonels in fur hats and with mobile phones were running like ordinary sergeants to keep pace with adolescent demonstrators. Gosh, they were gasping for breath!" an RFE/RL Minsk correspondent reported, expressing her shock at the heavy attendance of uniformed policemen and plainclothes at the march. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 15)

March 25, 2001

BELARUSIANS MARK FREEDOM DAY WITH ANTIGOVERNMENT RALLIES

Some 5,000 people participated in a march and a rally in Minsk on 25 March to mark Freedom Day, which is observed by the Belarusian opposition on the anniversary of the creation of the non-Bolshevik Belarusian Democratic Republic in 1918, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Demonstrators protested against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime and demanded free and fair presidential elections this year. The unauthorized demonstration took place with the heavy attendance of riot police troops, which were commanded personally by Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau. Minsk police said 13 demonstrators were arrested after the rally. In Hrodna, some 2,000 people demonstrated to mark Freedom Day, and smaller rallies took place in other Belarusian cities. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 26)

POLITICS (Opposition)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAID TO BE SUFFERING FROM 'MOSAIC PSYCHOPATHY.' — The independent *"Nasha Svaboda"* on 12 January published a "medical conclusion" by Belarusian psychiatrist Dzmitry Shchyhelski stating that Belarusian President Lukashenka is suffering from a "moderately pronounced psychopathy with the prevalence of traits of a paranoid and distractive personality disorder." Shchyhelski provided a lengthy analysis of Lukashenka's deeds and career to prove his medical conclusion. According to Shchychelski, Lukashenka's remaining in the post of Belarusian president "is posing a direct threat to both the citizens of the republic and the preservation of peace and stability in the region." Shchyhelski, who is currently on a trip in the U.S., told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service that since 1996 doctors in virtually all psychiatric clinics in Belarus have been discussing symptoms of Lukashenka's psychopathic "deviations." (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 15)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION MULLS SINGLE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE — The Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces, which unites five major opposition parties in Belarus, has discussed the fielding of a single democratic candidate against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in this year's presidential ballot, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 17 January. The council is planning to hold a roundtable with the participation of other opposition parties as well as a congress of democratic forces in order to propose a single presidential challenger. Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka said the united opposition has already scored a success by reducing the number of discussed hopefuls to three: Syamyon Domash, Mikhail Chyhir, and Uladzimir Hancharyk (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 17 January 2001). "It is essential that all the three candidates have no party affiliation. This is a signal to those [opposition party] leaders who are considering their participation in the presidential race," Vyachorka noted.(RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 18)

BELARUSIAN TRADE UNIONS OKAY LEADER'S PRESIDENTIAL BID — The Presidium of the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions on 25 January endorsed the proposal by "trade unionists and other citizens" to field Federation leader Uladzimir Hancharyk in this year's presidential elections, Belapan reported. RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported the same day that the Federation nonetheless fears possible reprisals by the authorities because of Hancharyk's presidential bid. According to some opinions voiced during the Federation Presidium's gathering, the Minsk City authorities have recently applied "large-scale pressure" to city working collectives in order to split the trade union movement and create a government-controlled trade union structure in the capital. (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 26)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEARNS NONVIOLENT METHODS TO COUNTER REGIME — Some 40 Belarusian oppositionists on 26 January began a five-day seminar in Vilnius to learn how to conduct a nonviolent resistance movement against the authoritarian regime in their homeland, AP and Reuters reported. "The experience we get here will help us fight those who have ruled our country far too long," exiled Belarusian Popular Front leader Zyanon Paznyak told journalists in Vilnius. The seminar is organized by a Lithuanian non-governmental organization and the U.S. Albert Einstein Institute. The Belarusian Embassy in Vilnius denounced the seminar as a measure intended to destabilize Belarus on the eve of the presidential elections (see story below). The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry said it has no knowledge of the seminar other than media reports. (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 29)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION STILL UNDECIDED ON SINGLE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE — The Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces, which represents Belarus's four major opposition parties, has postponed the discussion of a single opposition candidate for two weeks, Belapan reported on 8 February. Viktar Ivashkevich told the agency that the council wants to prevent the establishment of several presidential election teams to challenge President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Ivashkevich noted that the council prefer Syamyon Domash as a single candidate but there is a threat

that Mikhail Chyhir and Uladzimir Hancharyk may choose to run without coordination, thus weakening the election chances of a democratic candidate. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 9)

NEW OPPOSITION MOVEMENT IN BELARUS ADOPTS BISON AS SYMBOL — On February 13, many Belarusian independent newspapers and news agencies were invited by e-mail to take part in a press conference organized by a new nationwide opposition movement called Zubr [the Belarusian word for "bison"], in the park near the Belarusian State Theater of Opera and Ballet, reported *Nasha Svaboda*, an independent newspaper. An unidentified young man stood up and read a statement at the action as follows:

"Belarus has become an authoritarian police state where human rights are routinely violated and the freedom of assembly, association and information blatantly disregarded. Political opponents are either exiled, imprisoned or made to disappear. The regime wants to eliminate the love for the native language and the centuries-old national symbols from the hearts of Belarusians. The organization has chosen "Zubr" as a symbol of power derived from nature, and will base its activities on non-violent resistance to dictatorship."

(*Nasha Svaboda*, February 14)

BELARUSIAN PARTY URGES EXILED LEADER TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT — The opposition Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front has appealed to its exiled leader, Zyanon Paznyak, to run in this year's presidential elections, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Paznyak left Belarus in April 1996 -- fearing that the regime might seek his liquidation -- and obtained political asylum in the U.S. It is not clear whether he may be registered as a presidential candidate. The 1996 constitution stipulates that a presidential candidate must "permanently live in the Republic of Belarus no less than 10 years directly before the elections." Paznyak's Conservative Christian Party does not participate in the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces, which unites four other major opposition parties. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 20)

BELARUSIAN ASYLEES UNITE IN POLAND — The Union of Belarusian Political Asylees was established in Poland to provide legal and financial assistance to people of Belarusian nationality, who were forced to leave Belarus for political reasons, and unite their efforts for the struggle against the Lukashenka dictatorship. According to Ian Obodovsky, chair of the founding committee, the regime takes advantage of the Polish-Belarusian agreement on legal cooperation by filing criminal charges against opposition activists, who applied for political asylum in Poland, and demanding their extradition. [The Belarusian authorities do not use forced exile, although there were credible reports that the security services threatened opposition political activists and trade union leaders with criminal prosecution or physical harm if they did not cease their activities and depart the country.-Ed.]. (PAP news agency, February 25)

FORMER BELARUSIAN DEFENSE MINISTER DECLARES PRESIDENTIAL BID — Colonel General Pavel Kazlouski has announced that he will run as a candidate in this year's presidential race, Belapan reported on 23 February. Kazlouski said he can no longer tolerate the situation in the Armed Forces where, according to him, the needs of military personnel are completely ignored. Kazlouski was the first defense minister of independent Belarus and resigned in 1994, after Alyaksandr Lukashenka won the presidential elections. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 26)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION STILL UNDECIDED ON SINGLE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE — The Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces has once again failed to agree on a single candidate to challenge President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in this year's presidential ballot, Belapan reported on 13 March. The council said it will decide on a single candidate "as soon as possible" but no later than 27 June, which is the last legal date for the authorities to announce the presidential elections. Regional opposition activists are urging the council to appoint Syamyon Domash, former governor of the Hrodna Oblast, as a single democratic candidate. Andrey Sannikau, who chaired the council's meeting on 13 March, told journalists that by postponing its decision the council wants to preserve the current harmonious cooperation between Domash and three others aspiring to run against Lukashenka: Mikhail Chyhir, Uladzimir Hancharyk, and Pavel Kazlouski. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 14)

POLITICS (Government)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT BLASTS OSCE MISSION FOR EXCEEDING MANDATE...— Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on Belarusian Television on 27 January that the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk is overstepping its mandate by creating a "corps of 14,000-18,000 militants" who, under the disguise of election observers, may become a threat to the country's stability. Lukashenka noted that the OSCE mission's mandate covers only assistance in improving Belarusian legislation and monitoring of developments in the country. He said, however, that Belarus's electoral legislation has already been improved to meet international standards and will not be changed until this year's presidential elections. Lukashenka claimed to have put the OSCE mission's budget under his control and to have persuaded the mission to give up its intention to form a legion of paid "militants."(RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 29)

...PLEDGES TO WARD OFF 'YUGOSLAV SCENARIO' IN BELARUS — Lukashenka said he took a "tough stance" on the OSCE mission following the opposition's and some Western "observer's" promises to stage a "Yugoslav scenario" in Belarus during the presidential elections this fall. "No, there will be no Yugoslavia here. As long as I am president, this will not happen.... I will not push you [Belarusians] to the barricades, I will go ahead of you, I will defend my people," Lukashenka promised, warning the television viewers that Belarus may be bombed "from above with shells stuffed with allegedly depleted uranium." (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 29)

MINSK ADMONISHES VILNIUS OVER SEMINAR FOR BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION — The Belarusian Foreign Ministry summoned Lithuanian Ambassador Jonas Paslauskas on 30 January to express concern about a recent Vilnius-based seminar on "non-violent democratic resistance in Belarus" for some 40 Belarusian opposition figures (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 29 January 2001), Belapan reported. The ministry noted that the seminar was of a "clearly destructive nature" and "aimed at creating unfavorable conditions" in Belarus before this year's presidential ballot. According to the ministry's press release, Paslauskas "shared the concern of the Belarusian side and gave assurances that the Lithuanian government had nothing to do with the event," noting that the seminar was organized by private individuals.(RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 31)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT BRIEFS INTELLECTUALS ON THEIR TASKS... — Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 1 February addressed a nationwide conference in Minsk of "workers of culture and activists of the arts," Belarusian Television and Belapan reported. He told that forum that he does not interfere in the sphere of culture as regards "trifles," but remains very attentive to general cultural and intellectual trends in

the country. According to Lukashenka, Belarusian intellectuals should "defend the cultural heritage and spiritual wealth of the entire Slavic civilization from the aggressive impact of globalization or, more precisely, Americanization." Lukashenka promised to support such efforts with improved housing conditions for intellectuals: two blocks of apartments are to be build in Minsk, one in each oblast center, and several apartments in each raion center. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 2)

...URGES THEM TO ACCEPT FOREIGN MONEY — Lukashenka also said $70.8 million out of a planned $108 million has already been sent to Belarus from abroad to finance this year's presidential campaign. He did not identify the sponsors, noting only that the money is not intended for him. He suggested to the intellectuals that they may obtain part of that money and urged them to accept it. In what was apparently intended as a joke but came over as a pronouncement of utter disrespect for his listeners, Lukashenka said: "Why should you accept [that money]? Because they will pay for your talent. It is not important whether you will sing [the praises of] Lukashenka or another candidate--the people will be listening to you. This I call a good investment in our culture."(RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 2)

LUKASHENKA SEES NO NEED FOR REFORM IN AGRICULTURE — Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 13 February discussed the situation in the agricultural sector with his ministers, Belarusian Television reported. According to Lukashenka, the sector does not need radical reform but "improvement." He said the country has a sufficient workforce, amount of machinery, and finances to see growth in agricultural production, adding that it lacks only "responsibility and discipline." Lukashenka noted that 50 percent of agricultural enterprises can operate without state support, while another 25 percent can work with "a little help" from the state. As regards the remaining 25 percent, the president said they need to be "radically reconstructed," but did not elaborate. Lukashenka stressed that large collective farms —kolkhozes, sovkhozes, and agro-industrial "complexes" — will remain "the foundation" of agricultural production in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 14)

LUKASHENKA SATISFIED WITH BELARUSIAN ECONOMY IN 1996-2000 — Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 15 February conferred with his ministers on the fulfillment of a government program called "Basic Directions of the Socioeconomic Development of the Republic of Belarus in 1996-2000," Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka expressed his satisfaction with the cabinet's economic performance in the past five years, saying the country's GDP in that period increased by 36 percent, industrial production by 60 percent, and real incomes by 70 percent. He noted that Belarus is well ahead of other CIS countries according to many socioeconomic parameters, including the human development index (56th place in the world), per capita GDP ($7,000), and per capita meat production (65 kilograms annually). He urged his ministers to continue and even improve their fine work and ordered them to keep the monthly inflation rate below 2.5 percent. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 16)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT RECEIVES U.S. AMBASSADOR'S CREDENTIALS — Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 22 February received credentials from U.S. Ambassador to Belarus Michael Kozak, who arrived in Minsk on 20 October 2000. Lukashenka's refusal to meet Kozak for such a long time was widely seen as a snub to Washington for U.S. criticism of his regime and policies. "Let us today draw a line under all those [past] relations between Belarus and the U.S., let us take the very best [from them].... Let us draw a line below all our deeds [and] statements, and let us try to begin our relations on a much higher level," Belarusian Television quoted Lukashenka as saying. (RFE/RL Newsline, Febr. 23)

STATE TV JOURNALIST COUNTS U.S. SPIES IN BELARUS — Alyaksandr Zimouski said in a "special edition" of his weekly program "Rezanans" on Belarusian Television on 28 February that some 430 "workers of U.S. special services" were brought to Belarus by the U.S. embassy as diplomats during the past eight years, Belapan reported. According to Zimouski, U.S. intelligence activities in Belarus now focus on discrediting all aspects of Belarus's policies, provoking and escalating political and economic controversies between Belarus and other countries, financially supporting the Belarusian opposition, and stirring up "separatist sentiment and interdenominational controversies." Zimouski noted that earlier the U.S. intelligence services focused on recruiting agents and informers in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 1)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT BANS USE OF FOREIGN AID FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES... — Alyaksandr Lukashenka has issued a decree regulating the use of "foreign gratuitous aid" in the country, Belarusian Television reported on 14 March. The station said the decree bans the use of foreign aid for activities oriented toward changing the constitutional system or overthrowing state authorities. In particular, the decree prohibits the use of foreign aid for the preparation of elections, rallies, strikes, seminars, "propagandistic materials," and "other forms of propagandistic work among the population." Mechyslau Hryb, former chairman of the Supreme Soviet, told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service that Lukashenka's decree actually intends to prevent the opposition and international community from preparing monitors for this year's presidential elections. The preparation of election monitors in Belarus has thus far been sponsored by foreign grants. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 15)

LUKASHENKO WANTS POLL OBSERVER RESTRICTIONS — On March 15, Alexander Lukashenko said that he would ban the training of election observers by non-Belarusian bodies, reported Belapan. "There will be no guerrillas in Belarus — write that down and tell people" Lukashenko told reporters, while visiting a factory in Minsk. "We will allow [only] those things provided for by our constitution. It says that the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda trains observers," said the Belarusian strongman. "There will be no other president here and I am not kidding," he concluded. (Belapan, March 15)

BELARUSIAN KGB TO CRACK DOWN ON FOREIGNERS — KGB chief Leanid Yeryn pledged on Belarusian Television on 24 March to intensify the surveillance of foreigners in Belarus in order to prevent them from interfering in the country's domestic matters. According to Yeryn, foreign organizations and citizens, under the cover of providing humanitarian assistance or monitoring human rights, have recently stepped up their activities "to stir up the population's distrust in the current state system, the government, and the political, economic, and socioeconomic course" in Belarus. "Neither the president nor the KGB nor law enforcement bodies have any fear. It is others who fear: the CIA leadership and some State Department newcomers...who want to prove that the money spent on so-called humanitarian assistance — and we call it humanitarian intervention in our republic — was not wasted," Yeryn said. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 26)

LUKASHENKO APPOINTS NEW DEFENSE MINISTER — Apparently taking cues from his Russian counterpart, Alexander Lukashenko dismissed Defense Minister Alexander Chumakov, appointing Leonid Maltsev, deputy chief of the

Security Council, in his place, reported Belapan on March 28. The Ministry of Defense announced that Chumakov, who had held the post since 1997, had decided to resign, but the Security Council described the move as part of personnel changes. Until 1997, the position was held by General Maltsev, who was sacked by Lukashenko for appearing drunk at a public function. Chumakov's departure came six weeks after Lukashenko sacked his chief of staff and deputy defense minister Mikhail Kozlov. The move came after the announcement in Moscow of the dismissal of Marshall Igor Sergeev, Russian Defense Minister, who was replaced by Sergei Ivanov, chief of the Russian Security Council and one of President Putin's closest aides. (Belapan, March 28)

BELARUSIAN DICTATOR CONTINUES RULING WITH IRON FIST — On March 29, making an early start to his election campaign in Grodno, Alexander Lukashenko warned that anyone seeking to unseat him in the presidential election to be held in September would be substituting his iron rule with "anarchy," reported Belapan. "Either we can follow a positive path of gradually adding value through working really hard -- or we can return to political adventurism, social cataclysms and the ultimate poverty of the common people," Lukashenko said after the inauguration of Grodno's new governor. "Yes, the authorities are iron. Seven years ago, the only person not kicking the authorities was the tramp on the street. We took government out of the dirt, washed it and brushed it up." Lukashenko made clear he did not expect to change his style of government. "The country needs a powerful government, not anarchy or chaos," he said. Lukashenko reiterated criticism of foreign election observers who want to monitor the presidential election. "I want to tell foreign well-wishers: do not meddle in our affairs. We will not let anyone speak the language of blackmail and threats," he said. (Belapan, March 30)

ECONOMY

BELARUSIAN STREET VENDORS ON STRIKE — Entrepreneurs who sell goods on street corners are on strike across Belarus to protest the introduction of new income tax and customs laws that they say will undercut their business, Interfax-West reported on 3 January. Organizers hope that more than half of the registered traders in Minsk, Borisov, Slutsk, Soligorsk, Grodno, Gomel, Mozyr, Rogachev, and Vitebsk will take part. Currently the strike is set to end on 5 January, but organizers said they may extend it if their demands for modification of the regulations are not met.(RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 4)

BELARUSIAN PREMIER URGES FOR RUSSIAN INVESTMENT — Prime Minister Uladzimir Yarmoshyn on 3 April called on cabinet ministers "to stimulate work with Russian capital" in order to attract it into the Belarusian economy, Interfax reported. According to Yarmoshyn, the role of Russian capital in Belarus is especially important in view of the lack of Western investment. He said the government needs to privatize state enterprises on a broader scale in order to attract Russian investors. Yarmoshyn also instructed his ministers to switch from barter deals to cash settlements with Russian energy and fuel suppliers in "a maximally brief period of time." He added: "The Russian side categorically demands the elimination of barter in mutual trade, and all our cadres should clearly realize that." (RFE/RL Newsline, April 4)

CULTURE and SOCIETY

- **New CD's in Belarusian:**
  — "Łastaūki na stresie" (Swallows on the Roof)
  Collection of rare performances by Michas Zabejda-Sumicki
  Produced by the Belarusian Musical Archive

  — "Ja naradziūsia tut" (I was born here)
  Collection of Belarusian patriotic songs
  Produced by Aleś Suša

- **Production of the Belarusian video-club:**
  — Films with Viktar Šałkievič's participation
  a) "Slozy błudnaha syna"(Tears of the Prodigal Son)
  Directed by V. Asluk, starring V. Šalkievič
  Reflection on fate of Belarusian people, their constant sacrifices, their "tolerance" and lack of a hero. Leaves a powerful impression.
  b) "Sałodki jad kachańnia" (Sweet Poison of Love)
  Directed by V. Dašuk, starring V. Šałkievič, J.Rusakievič
  Historical film describing the romance of king Žyhimont and Barbara Radzivił.

  — " Na čornych ladach" (In black-forested hills)
  Produced in 1995.
  Film describes the uneven fight of Słucak insurgents against the invading Red Army in1920.

  — "Fifth Element" - a U.S. movie starring Bruce Willis translated into Belarusian in 2000 by Vital Stanišeuski.
  Belarusian sound dubbing by V. Stanišeuski

  — Other western films translated into Belarusian in the Belarusian video-club:
  "Brave Heart" starring Mel Gibson, "Matrix"

  Latest information on Belarusian-language video production is presented on web site
  http://www.belvidea.cjb/net

* **Dzied Tałaš** (Grandfather Talash), **http://dt.home.by**
is the first and most popular Belarusian internet site.
It contains links to: Belarusian independent press, Politics, Internet News, Computers, Culture, Music, Humor, Sport, Entertainment
Dzied Tałaš was created in 2000 by Mr. Janka Łatuška.

- **Interesting Statistics:**

—According to data collected by the Sociology Institute of Belarus' National Academy of Sciences, about 300 scientists and university teachers have emigrated from Belarus in the years 1991-1995. 38% of them went to the USA, 32% — to Israel, 10% — to Russia, 7 % — to Germany, 3% — to Canada. In the next five years this number has doubled

— On Jan. 2000 the Roman Catholic church in Belarus numbered 399 parishes, served by 237 priests, out of which 150 were citizens of other countries, including 133 from Poland.

The Greek-Catholic (Uniate) church accounted for 13 congregations. The largest were in Miensk, their membership coming from Belarusian intelligentsia.

The Protestant denominations accounted for 862 congregations. In the last 5 years the number of Protestant Christians in Belarus grew 5 times.

• **Results of the 1999 Census:**

a) Ethnic composition of Belarus' population:

Belarusians — 81 %
Russians — 11%
Poles — 4%

b) language statistics:

73.7% considered Belarusian their NATIVE language
36.7% spoke Belarusian at home

There are groups of population using Belarusian exclusively.

For example, in the whole country, 84.9% of rural ethnic Poles (according to census) speak Belarusian at home, and only 41.9% of this group have command of Russian.

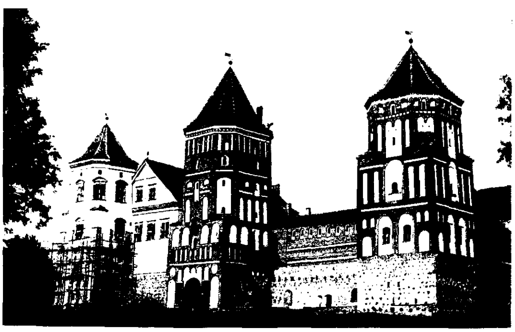
In Miensk and Bierascie regions over 50% of all people speak Belarusian at home, and 30% do not have command of Russian.

• **The castle in MIR — a unique monument of Belarusian architecture** — was included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage monuments.

It was built by duke Ilinič in the early 16th century near the village of Mir (Navahradak region). The castle is a square building with towers in each corner. The fifth tower had a drawbridge. The towers were well adapted for cannon defense.

Gothic bricklaying (alternation of long and short sides of bricks) was used for the original decoration of the Mir castle. Since 1568 the castle was owned by Dukes Radziwill, who finished the building in the Renaissance style.

In the course of its history the castle was destroyed several times (most heavily during the 1812 war). At various times it provided place of worship for 3 world religions: Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches and the Hebrew religion.



The MIR Castle

• **10th Anniversary of the Belarusian Humanist Educational Lyceum***

The Lyceum was established on Jan. 15, 1991 in Miensk by Prof. Uładzimier Kołas. Since then it became the first truly Belarusian-language school on its educational level. It acquired the reputation of "the forge of Belarusian national intelligentsia".

Its uniqueness lies not only in the Belarusian language of instruction, but also in the quality of its teaching staff: Vincuk Viačorka (philologist and leader of the Belarusian Popular Front), Lavon Barščeŭski (translator from foreign languages; another BPF leader), Michaś Tyčyna (poet), Vasil Siomucha (translator of Bible), Anatol Sidarevič (leader of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party) and others. Another distinct feature of the Lyceum are the regular meetings of students with leading figures of the contemporary Belarusian culture.

Like many other Belarusian cultural and civic organizations, in the last few years the Lyceum has been feeling the shadow of Damocles' sword — the threat of closure. Today it does not own its original building, and Prof. Kolas has been demoted to a deputy director.

Lyceum's curriculum is extensive — it includes economics, logic, history, Belarusian language, history of architecture and music. The graduates acquire knowledge normally required at the beginning university level. Not everyone is able to successfully graduate from the Lyceum; its future students are selected annually on basis of competitive entrance tests. Source: *Belarusian Digest*, Febr. 2001; *Radio Racyja*

* Lyceum = middle school, preparing students for university studies.

• **Anniversary of Horadnia newspaper PAHONIA:**

BELARUSIAN REVIEW cordially congratulates PAHONIA with its 500th issue.

Since its establishment on March 25, 1992, PAHONIA has remained a mainstay of everything Belarusian in our country — Belarusian language, Belarusian ideas and Belarusian honesty. The steadfastness of its staff and its chief editor Mikoła Markievič are admired by today's readers and will be appreciated by the future generations.

I CAN LIVE BETTER !

Is the name of a continuing self-improvement seminar that is currently being presented in Belarus. The aim of the seminar is to provide all interested people in Belarus, regardless of age or educational level an opportunity to learn established principles of self-development. These may be in various spheres of life, such as social, spiritual or mental, physical and financial. The principles taught in the seminar will aid the participants who will practice them over a period of time to achieve more of their potential. Such practice will help them reach greater self-reliance, greater sense of personal independence which then can expand to their immediate surrounding and eventually to the society as a whole.

The people in the countries of Eastern Europe have survived more than half a century under Communist rule. Private initiative was suppressed and personal responsibility discouraged if not punished. The State and the Party provided all and controlled all. The country of Belarus, now newly independent has suffered this oppression longer than most of its neighbors and its impact has left unfortunate consequences. Continued dependence on authorities, the imprint of foreign occupations and destructive wars, as well as the current economic and political situation are impeding many Belarusians from developing a sense of non-dependence.

The idea that individuals can choose to improve their lot in various spheres of life is the dominant idea of the "I can live better!" seminars. They are based on a workbook prepared by Walter Stankievich, former Director of RFE/RL Belarus Broadcast Service, who in the course of his ten years with the Radios became acutely aware of the need of many Belarusians to learn to assume greater personal and civic responsibility. The author drew on the substantial amount of self-development literature available in the West, including such concepts as the role of one's self-image, personal mission statement, concrete goal-setting, positive affirmations and visualization and the significance of expectations. The idea of such self-development seminars gained support among civic leaders in Belarus and the Belarusian diaspora. Contacts were established with various cultural and educational organizations in Belarus, as well as students' groups and trade unions. The Society of Belarusian Language (TBM), a respected cultural and educational organization with more than 70 branches in the country was selected to handle administrative tasks.

The first seminar session took place in Minsk at the end of October 2000. To date more than 20 seminars have been conducted in various Belarusian cities. Each 6-hour seminar session is conducted by a specially prepared instructor and is presented to a small group of no more than 20 people. This arrangement allows for effective interaction between the instructor and the seminar participants both during and individually after the seminar. Those attending are supplied with the workbook that allows them to practice the principles learned later on their own. The first of quarterly re-enforcement seminars was held in Minsk in January 2001. At

this seminar a number of practicing graduates expressed their gratitude for being able to apply some of the self-improvement principles in their daily life. Some indicated that the difference in their attitude was already noted by family members and by their co-workers.

The seminars are essentially self-financing with those attending covering the costs of the session and receiving their own workbook. A special scholarship fund has been set up to help pay half of the admission for students and others not able to pay the full amount. A support group for the seminars has been established in Belarusian diaspora whose task it is to replenish the scholarship fund through donations and special fundraisers. The support group has conducted two very effective book and cassette sales and is looking for others interested in joining this activity. Members of the support group are also planning to stay in touch with seminar graduates interested in possible business joint ventures, student exchanges, tourism opportunities, publishing projects and similar activities. A video version of the seminar "I can live better!" is planned in order to expand the program beyond the seminar sessions. The video cassette together with the workbook will allow many more people to practice the self-improvement principles independently and later meet with others at the quarterly re-enforcement seminars in order to learn more and exchange experiences and develop helpful contacts for possible future cooperation.

Anyone interested in learning more about the seminars and about the activity of the support group can write to this publication or via e-mail to the support group itself: stankievichw@hotmail.com

INDEPENDENT MEDIA

INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER REPRIMANDED — The Lukashenko government deploys an ingenious array of methods to muffle the independent press, from beating journalists to financial pressure and rigid censorship, report journalists from Minsk. On February 6, Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta (BDG), an independent newspaper, was reprimanded by the office of the Prosecutor General for publishing in a December issues an article titled "The Blood of Almaz" about the disappearance of Dmitry Zavadsky, a cameraman with the Russian public television network ORT, who has been missing since July 7, 2000. The office of the Prosecutor General alleged that the information disclosed in the article was stolen from the database of the official investigation. Petr Martsev, BDG's editor-in-chief, failed to convince the authorities that the paper conducted an independent investigation, using information from its own sources, which is not prohibited by the law. The newspaper intends to appeal the warning in court. According to the Article 16 of the Belarusian Law on Press, a newspaper may be closed after receiving two warnings within a year. (Belarus Update # 4, February 5, 2001)

TWENTY INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERS REPRIMANDED BY STATE IN 2000 — On February 3, in an interview with Panorama, a main news commentary program broadcast by Belarusian State Television, Mikhail Podgainy, chair of the State Press Committee, said that twenty independent periodicals were warned in the year 2000 for not complying with the media law or with media registration regulations, reported Belapan. According to Podgainy, independent press circulation remains low and makes up only about 20 percent of the official printed media distribution. The combined, single-issue circulation for all state media is some 2 million copies, while the combined single-issue circulation of independent newspapers is just about half a million copies. (Belarus Update # 4, February 5, 2001)

BELARUS IS BACK TO SOVIET CENSORSHIP — Under the pretext of protecting the public from subversive ideas, the regime continues to restrict the freedom of speech. Mikhail Myasnikovich, head of the Lukashenko administration, issued an order obliging the press services of state institutions to check the reliability of their reports with the National press service and the press service of the Presidential Administration to ensure "objectivity of information" published in the state press, reported Nasha Svaboda, an independent newspaper. Vladimir Zametalin, Lukashenka's ideologist, will be in charge of fulfilling the order, which will further curtail freedom of the media in the country. In 1999, the Lukashenko government undertook a series of obligations to ensure absence of censorship and providing equal access to state-controlled media. It is obvious today that those promises were yet another attempt to misguide the international community while continuing the practice of violating human rights. *(Nasha Svaboda,* March 19)

HUMAN RIGHTS

NEW CRIMINAL AND PROCEDURAL CODE IN FORCE — On January 1, the new Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedures, which were adopted in June 1999, entered into force. While introducing the new codes, Alexander Lukashenko claimed they meet international standards and are the most democratic among CIS countries, reported Itar-Tass. Local and international experts say that no real reform of the judiciary is envisaged by the new legislation. Investigative bodies remain under the control of executive branch, namely, the Interior Ministry, the Prosecution, and the Security Service. Investigators are appointed by and report to the heads of the respective state institutions. Nothing is offered to ease the plight of detainees, who are often treated with cruelty and humiliation. There are many instances of where illegal methods of investigation, including torture, are used to obtain confessions. Investigation and court proceedings are often prolonged, from several months to several years. The cases of Vasily Starovoitov, former head of the country's most successful agricultural joint-stock company; Vasily Leonov, former Minister of Agriculture, and Andrei Klimov, a deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet and businessman, were in pre-trial investigation for more than two years. During the time, those under investigation were remanded in custody since Belarus has no bail system. Under Lukashenko, judges are pressured to submit to government will, particularly in political cases. Telephone justice, the practice of executive and local authorities dictating court decisions, is widely reported to continue. Judges are appointed and promoted by presidential decrees. Public defenders are often employed by human rights NGOs, especially for political trials, since state attorneys are afraid to participate in such proceedings. The new Criminal Code, which says nothing about public defenders, will further limit the possibilities for public defenders assistance in criminal cases. The jury system has not been introduced. (Belarus Update # 1, Jan. 5. 2001)

OPPOSITION YOUTH ORGANIZATION DENIED REGISTRATION — The unlawful persecution of NGOs continues in Belarus, taking the form of refusals or delays in registration, intimidation and oppression of their leaders and activists, and slander campaigns in the state mass media. The Malady (Youth) Front, an opposition youth organization, was officially informed about the Ministry of Justice decision of January 3, 2001, to deny its request for registration on the grounds that it found "irregularities" in the registration documents, reported Belapan. The Malady Front applied for registration on May 1, 2000. Existing legislation stipulates that the Ministry of Justice has to consider the application within one month, although the Malady Front had been waiting for the written confirmation of denial for almost nine months. The organization plans to appeal the Ministry's decision to the Supreme Court. In an interview to a Belapan correspon-

dent, Pavel Severinets, chair of the Malady Front and a former political prisoner, said that the Ministry's decision to denial the Front's request for registration is a manifestation of the regime's fear of the youth organization that can lead large crowds of young people to the street and to the polls during election. (Belarus Update # 4, Jan. 30, 2001)

BELARUSIAN YOUTH LEADER FINED FOR VALENTINE'S DAY MARCH — A Minsk district court on 19 February imposed a fine of some $450 (150 minimum wages) on Pavel Sevyarynets, leader of the Youth Front, for organizing and leading an unauthorized march on Valentine's Day (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 15 February 2001), Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. A police officer told the court that Sevyarynets violated the law also by waving a European Union flag during the march. "This is the regime's response to St. Valentine's Day and [our] action 'Love! Freedom! Changes!' -- one should not expect any love, freedom, or changes in Belarus," Sevyarynets said about the court verdict. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 20)

POTENTIAL OPPOSITION CANDIDATE TARGETED BY AUTHORITIES — Charter 97 reported that the Mogilev authorities ordered the administration of the Tourist hotel to cancel its agreement with Semyon Domash to host his February 24 meeting with potential voters. Domash is a deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet, chair of the Grodno Initiative and the Coordination Council of Belarusian Regions, and a potential opposition candidate to challenge Lukashenko in the forthcoming presidential election. All attempts to rent space at other city hotels failed as well. Some of the hotels' employees privately confirmed that they had received calls from the Mogilev City Council forbidding them to hold an "antigovernment gathering." The meeting finally took place in the local branch of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. A few days later, customs officials at the border near Bruzgi, Grodno Region, searched Domash, who was on his way to Poland, for two hours, evidently looking for printed, audio, or video materials, that could "damage the economic and political interests of the country." The record of the search notes that even Domash's coat and footwear were meticulously examined. (Charter 97, March 1)

ANOTHER CANDIDATE SUMMONED FOR INTERROGATION — *Nasha Svaboda* reported that Col.-Gen. Pavel Kozlovsky, former Belarusian defense minister, confirmed his intention to run against Alexander Lukashenko in an election due later this year, pledging wholesale government reform. "My goal is not just to beat the president, but to change the current regime," Kozlovsky told a Nasha Svaboda correspondent. He said he wanted to make the country more open to Europe. Kozlovsky, 58, was defense minister until Lukashenka's election in 1994 but has not participated in politics since. He said he would not stand under the banner of any opposition party. Kozlovsky's eagerness to run for the Belarusian presidency did not remain unnoticed by the regime, which can not stand the thought of giving up its sweeping powers. Recently, Kozlovsky was summoned and interrogated by the military prosecutor as a potential witness in a case opened February 5 against a German company which allegedly owes $175,000 in damages to a Belarusian tank repair plant. The Belarusian authorities claim that Germans failed to fully pay Belarus for metal scrap left after destruction of military machinery done by the company under an agreement signed by Kozlovsky, then Defense Minister, in 1994. (*Nasha Svaboda*, February 28)

MINSK FREEDOM DAY OBSERVERS ON TRIAL... — Minsk's Central District Court on 26 March sentenced Dzmitry Chabatarenka to 10 days in jail for violating public order during the Freedom Day rally in Minsk (see "RFE/RL Newsline, 26 March 2001). Lyudmila Hraznova, a deputy of the opposition Supreme Soviet, was fined 20 minimum wages (some $90) for the same offense. The court will try nine other people who were detained during the rally -- including opposition leader Vintsuk Vyachorka and human rights activist Ales Byalatski -- in the coming days. "All trials that take place today are political. In my opinion, this is understood by both judges and policemen who draw reports oriented toward appropriate articles [of the Code of Administrative Offences].... When the head of the Lukashenka administration or the interior minister supervises the dispersal of a demonstration, it is obvious that trials [of detained demonstrators] are political," Vyachorka told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 27)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER JAILED FOR 15 DAYS — A Minsk district court on 29 March sentenced Vintsuk Vyachorka, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, to 15 days in jail for the organization of the unauthorized Freedom Day march last week (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 29 March 2001), Belapan reported. Vyachorka denied that he was an organizer of the march, but the court took into account testimonies from two police officers who said Vyachorka incited the crowd through a megaphone. Belapan reported that participants of a similar Freedom Day rally in Hrodna will also go on trial. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 30)

BELARUSIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST JAILED FOR 10 DAYS — Ales Byalatski, head of the human rights center Vyasna and deputy chairman of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), has been sentenced to 10 days in jail for the organization of an unauthorized demonstration to mark Freedom Day on 25 March, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 2 April. "I think this sentence is unjust, but proceeding from the current situation in Belarus one should not expect anything else from our courts. These severe sentences for the 25 March [demonstration] testify to the fact that the authorities are trying to intimidate people and suppress the wave of vigorous spring protests that are now rising," Byalatski said of his punishment. BNF leader Vintsuk Vyachorka was handed a 15-day jail term (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 30 March 2001), while Yuras Belenki, deputy chairman of the Christian Conservative Party, goes on trial on 3 April. (RFE/RL Newsline, April 3)

ANOTHER BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER JAILED FOR 15 DAYS — A Minsk court on 4 April sentenced Yuras Belenki to 15 days in jail for his alleged role in the organization of an unauthorized demonstration to mark Freedom Day on 25 March, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Belenki, who is acting head of the opposition Conservative Christian Party (its leader, Zyanon Paznyak, is currently in exile), denied his guilt. Previously, the same court jailed Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka for 15 days and human rights activist Ales Byalatski for 10 days (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 30 March and 3 April 2001). Next on the judicial conveyor belt is Youth Front leader Pavel Sevyarynets, who was to go on trial on 5 April on the same charges as Belenki, Vyachorka, and Byalatski. (RFE/RL Newsline, April 5)

BELARUS & the WORLD

BELARUS WANTS TO RESUME DIALOGUE WITH U.S. AND EUROPE — Belarus is ready to come out of its isolation and resume a more constructive dialogue with both the United States and West European countries, Mikhail Khvostov, Belarusian Foreign Minister said on January 8. We admit that the U.S. is a world power that one must have good relations with, Khvostov said. Belarus is ready to negotiate and present its views on the problems in our bilateral relations, the minister said, adding that it is necessary to find things

to unite us, not keep us apart. It is also important for Belarus to find mutual understanding with European institutions, particularly with OSCE, the Council of Europe, and European Union, Khvostov said. Belarus is in the very heart of Europe and is an integral part of it, so one should not isolate our country, he added. Khvostov was speaking in Moscow after talks with his Russian counterpart Igor Ivanov, focusing on cooperation between Moscow and Minsk in both their bilateral and foreign policies. Belarus hopes to enlist Russian aid in dealing with political obstacles in its relations with the West, paving the way for stronger economic ties with Europe, Khvostov said. Khvostov concluded his two-day visit to Russia by signing a schedule for consultations to be held this year between the foreign ministries of both countries. (Belapan, January 8-9)

U.S.: RESTORE CLIMATE OF TRUST BY HOLDING DEMOCRATIC ELECTION — On December 21, in an interview to the Belarusian state TV that was never aired, Michael Kozak, formerly chief of the U.S. diplomatic mission to Cuba and now the new U.S. Ambassador to Minsk, said that he would also love to see bilateral relations improved and normalized. But to accomplish that task we need to deal with the perception that exists in the United States and in Europe that the processes by which the presidents term was extended in 1996 and the Belarusian parliament was recently selected did not meet basic democratic standards applicable to all OSCE members, Kozak said. He added that the coming presidential election provides an excellent opportunity for the Belarusian authorities to bring the electoral process up to the democratic standards and restore a climate of trust between the two countries. We are ready to work with whoever wins the election as long as it comes out in a democratic way that can match up to the European standards, the Ambassador said. The full text of the interview can be found at: http://www.usembassy.minsk.by/html/btv_interview.html

U.S. OFFICIAL MEETS OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN MINSK — On January 23-24, John Armstrong, Belarus Desk Officer at the U.S. Department of State, held meetings with the potential presidential candidates from the opposition and journalists at the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, reported Belapan. Lydia Yarmoshyna, head of the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda, canceled a scheduled meeting. Semyon Domash, a deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet and chair of the Grodno Initiative and the Coordination Council of Belarusian Regions, Vladimir Goncharik, chair of the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions, and representatives of Mikhail Chigir, former Prime Minister, shared with John Armstrong their views on the political situation in the country. The representatives of the independent press said at the meeting that the regime maintains an economic monopoly over the press through its ownership of nearly all printing and broadcasting facilities and its management of the distribution of all print media through official outlets. Independent newspapers have been severely harassed and restricted by censorship, intimidation of journalists, and arbitrary fines and taxation. They cited a draft of the Law On Information Security and the recent seizure of one of the two printing presses operated by Magic, the main independent publishing house for eighteen independent and opposition periodicals in Minsk, as indicators that the pressure on the independent media is becoming increasingly strong in the run-up to the presidential election. (Belarus Update # 4, January 24, 2001)

BELARUSIAN LEGISLATURE TO SEEK RESTORATION OF GUEST STATUS IN PACE — A delegation of the Chamber of Representatives is in Strasbourg to seek the restoration of Belarus's guest status in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Interfax reported on 22 January. That status was suspended following the 1996 controversial constitutional referendum which abolished the Supreme Soviet and introduced a bicameral legislature consisting of the Chamber of Representatives and the Council of the Republic. According to European observers, last year's elections to the Chamber of Representatives were undemocratic. Belarusian lawmaker Alyaksandr Shpileuski told Belapan on 21 January that the delegation will seek the restoration of Belarus's guest status on the premise that last year's elections were recognized by the Belarusian people and do not need any international recognition. Interfax reported that two representatives of the Belarusian opposition will also appear at the PACE hearings in Strasbourg. (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 22)

LUKASHENKA URGES END TO MINSK'S CONTACTS WITH PACE... — Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 24 January said Minsk should stop seeking contacts with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which recently failed to restore Belarus's guest status (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 24 January 2001). "Our parliamentarians should stop all their trips and crawling on their knees in front of PACE or any other organization... We should cooperate with those who want to cooperate with our parliament... We will save several thousand dollars on membership fees and give [that money] to people for medicines," Belarusian Television quoted Lukashenka as saying. According to PACE officials and deputies quoted by RFE/RL's Belarusian Service, PACE may return to considering the restoration of Minsk's guest status in the organization following this year's presidential ballot in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 25)

OSCE IN MINSK SAYS ITS PROJECTS NEED NO GOVERNMENT APPROVAL — The OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group said on 30 January that its projects in Belarus cannot be subject to the host government's approval, Belapan reported. The group noted that under the OSCE Permanent Council's decision of 14 December, OSCE missions "have to conduct consultations with their respective host governments on projects financed by the [OSCE] budget or by voluntary contributions from OSCE Member States." However, the group said the OSCE Permanent Council rejected the proposal to make such projects dependent on the agreement or approval of the host country. The group was commenting on the Belarusian Foreign Ministry's request that OSCE projects in Belarus be preliminarily coordinated with the government (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 30 January 2001). (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 31)

BELARUS' SEAT IN OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY TO REMAIN VACANT... — The Credentials Committee of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly recommended in Vienna on 22 February that Belarus's seat in the assembly be kept vacant until the country meets the OSCE standards for democratic development. The Credentials Committee explained its position by saying the 15 October 2000 elections to the Chamber of Representatives fell short of OSCE standards, while the term of the opposition Supreme Soviet, which has represented Belarus in the assembly until now, expired last month. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Permanent Committee, however, did not accept the Credentials Committee's position because Russia and Armenia objected to the assessment of the Chamber of Representative in the proposed resolution. RFE/RL's Belarusian Service correspondent reported that "confused" OSCE Chairman Adrian Severin concluded the discussion by saying, "If our body cannot agree [on the issue], the seat of Belarus will remain vacant." (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 23)

...BUT SOME HAVE DOUBTS — Gert Weisskirchen, a member of the OSCE working group for Belarus, told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service that Adrian Severin's statement is "only

preliminary." According to Weisskirchen, the Supreme Soviet remains Belarus's "legitimate [legislature] from a normative point of view." Weisskirchen said the final decision on Belarus will be made by a session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Paris later this year, adding that in his opinion the Paris forum will confirm the membership of the Supreme Soviet in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Meanwhile, Belarusian Ambassador to the OSCE Viktar Haysyonak commented that Severin's decision in Vienna is a "step forward" because it terminates the membership of the Supreme Soviet in the assembly. (RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 23)

OSCE WANTS TALKS ON ELECTIONS BETWEEN BELARUSIAN GOVERNMENT, OPPOSITION — Hans Georg Wieck, head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk, has sent a proposal to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry to begin negotiations between the government and the opposition on the conditions for holding presidential elections in Belarus this year, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 2 March. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 5)

U.S. CONTINUES TO RECOGNIZE 13TH SUPREME SOVIET

— On March 1, Amb. David T. Johnson, U.S. representative to the OSCE, told the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna that the United States supports the decision of the Standing Committee of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly not to recognize the National Assembly of Belarus, the newly elected Lukashenko hand-picked parliament. He pointed out that the October 2000 election, which created this body were neither free nor fair, and that the United States continues to recognize the 13th Supreme Soviet as the legitimate Belarusian parliament until free and fair elections can be held for a new parliament. "We believe it is in Belarus' own interest to be seen as a state that respects the rule of law," said Amb. Johnson. He urged the Belarusian authorities to abide by the four OSCE criteria in connection with the presidential election to ensure that it will be recognized as free and fair by the entire international community. (USIA, March 2)

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY TROIKA IN MINSK TO URGE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL BALLOT — A delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe arrived in Minsk on 5 March to encourage Belarusian authorities to adhere to democratic norms during upcoming presidential elections. The delegation, led by OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Chairman Adrian Severin, met with representatives of Belarus' upper house, the Council of the Republic, and discussed the extension of the Belarusian legislature's powers. The European parliamentarians are also scheduled to meet with representatives of the government and the opposition. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 6)

WORLD BANK IS TO DEVELOP NEW STRATEGY OF ASSISTANCE — On March 12, the World Bank Group started a series of consultations in Minsk with the representatives of the Belarusian government, NGOs, community groups, media, professional associations, and religious groups working on social, health, and environmental issues to design a new strategy of assistance to the country, reported M2 Presswire. "The main goal of the Bank in Belarus is to assist the country in reaching the goals of poverty reduction and economic well-being," said Luca Barbone, World Bank Country Director for Ukraine and Belarus, who is currently in the country heading a team of Bank specialists hosting the consultations. The World Bank Group's activities in Belarus for the next three years will be described in a document called Country Assistance Strategy (CAS), which will contain the strategy that the Bank will follow in helping the country achieve these goals. One of the chief priorities of the new CAS will be to expand the Bank's cooperation with small and medium businesses through technical assistance and to help create an environment conducive to the development of the private sector in Belarus. (M2 Presswire, March 14)

NATO PARLIAMENTARIANS VISIT BELARUS — On March 25-27, a delegation of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, co-chaired by Markus Meckel, NATO PA Vice-President, and Alice Mahon, chair of the Sub-Committee on Democratic Governance, visited Minsk on a fact-finding mission, reported Belapan. The delegation held extensive discussions with Mikhail Khvostov, Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Belarusian parliamentarians, members of the political opposition not represented in the Lukashenko hand-picked parliament, trade union leaders, potential candidates in the forthcoming presidential election, civic organizations, media representatives, and relatives of disappeared political figures. The NATO PA delegation voiced its concern that some recent developments, such as Decree No. 8 submitting international aid to NGOs and civic organizations to exacting government control, are not conducive to the goal of democratization. It considers that the conditions in which the presidential election due later this year will be carried out shall be a key test of the Belarusian Government's real commitment to democracy. (Belapan, March 27)

CZECH LEGISLATORS, NGO PROTEST ARREST OF BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER — Czech senators Jan Ruml, Michal Zantovsky, Josef Zieleniec, lower house deputies Petr Mares and Marek Benda, as well as the People in Need humanitarian organization have protested the jailing for 15 days of Belarusian opposition leader Vintsuk Vyachorka (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 30 March 2001), CTK reported on 30 March. "We are convinced that this was a politically motivated decision by a court, which ignores basic human rights and freedoms --freedom of speech and freedom of assembly -- and is evidence of the undemocratic style of the current regime in Belarus," the protesters wrote in a statement. Meanwhile, the "Charter-97" Belarusian human rights group, quoting "informed sources," said the authorities intend to arrest a number of other opposition leaders and charge them, like Vyachorka, for the organization of an unauthorized Freedom Day demonstration on 25 March. (RFE/RL Newsline, April 2)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION ASKS INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO WORK ON REGIME — The Consultative Council of Opposition Political Parties has appealed to international organizations and foreign parliaments to use their influence to improve the political situation in Belarus in the run-up to this year's presidential election, Belapan reported on 5 April. The council's statement says the recent ballot for the Chamber of Representatives showed that the authorities do not intend to comply with international standards for democratic elections. The council notes that Belarus's parliamentary elections, marred by large-scale fraud, were the authorities' rehearsal for the presidential ballot. The appeal is addressed to the European Parliament, the OSCE Parliamentary Assemblies, the Council of Europe, NATO, and the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly as well as the parliaments of Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. (RFE/RL Newsline, April 6)

MEDIA WATCH

Free Elections in Belarus? (*Financial Times*, "Belarus 'will be free and fair,' ") March 9, 2001) — The article reports that Vladimir Yermoshin, prime minister of Belarus, during his visit to Latvia, said in an interview that forthcoming presidential elections in Belarus would be free and fair. He said the international community would have to recognize the outcome of the election, due this year, and dismissed claims that the poll would be rigged in favor of President Alexander Lukashenka. He accused the West of applying double standards toward Belarus and called on the European Union and the US to take steps to integrate Belarus into the international community.

Mr. Yermoshin denied claims by international human rights organizations that Mr. Lukashenko's administration represses its opponents: "There is constructive opposition that works in the interests of the state that we recognize and that has human rights and freedom of speech." But, according to Mr. Yermoshin, there is also an opposition that "conducts a policy of the destruction of the Belarusian state. This opposition, of course, the state cannot tolerate."

Ukraine Driven Toward Taking Belarusian Path (*Financial Times*, editorial "Kuchma in a Corner," March 12, 2001 —The editorial says that Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, after years of corruption and abuse of power, compounded by the recent disappearance and murder of a journalist, faces a stark choice. "Either he stands down . . . or he seeks to retain power at any cost . . . The first course would be best for Ukraine. The second risks domestic unrest and international isolation."

According to the editorial, the West is partly responsible for the crisis in Ukraine. "The US and the EU were so grateful to Kiev for helping to break up the Soviet Union that they poured money into Ukraine in the 1990s without setting sufficiently tough conditions. This strategy helped a smaller-Communist elite headed by Mr. Kuchma to keep power. In the past three years, donors tightened the screw. But the effect has been to drive a cash-strapped Ukraine closer to Russia, politically and economically, just as has happened with Belarus."

The editorial's advice: "The West must make clear that it supports Ukraine whilst distancing itself from Mr. Kuchma. It must stick to its recent tough line on economic aid. . . . But the international community must also maintain links with Ukrainians outside the government, through loans to small businesses, for example, aid for independent media organizations, humanitarian grants and Western scholarships for Ukrainians."

The Implication of Russia's New (Old) National Anthem (*Ottawa Citizen*, "National anthem," March 11, 2001) — The article is spotlighting the event of the 48th anniversary of Stalin's death, the restoration of the old Stalin hymn and the integration of Belarus into Russia. Gennadii Zyuganov, the communist leader, and various deputies of the Russian Duma placed flowers on Stalin's grave. Mr. Zyuganov observed that "It is impossible to resolve any problems without a strong state, without precise national policies as these were established during the time of Stalin." On the same day (March 5), Gennadii Seleznyev, the Duma speaker, gave a speech celebrating the reintegration of Belarus into Russia. Mr. Seleznyev said that "this was the model for the future, for an inevitable and objective process even it takes some time." Eventually, he hopes, the whole Soviet Union can be reassembled as it used to be.

Opposition Leaders on Effect of their Trips Abroad

Excerpts from an interview of Slovak weekly Domino-Forum (15 -21 February 2001) *with Vincuk Viacorka, chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front and the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces of Belarus, and Ales Bialacki, chairman of the Assembly of Non-governmental Organizations of Belarus.*

DF: What significance do you attribute to your meeting with Czech President Havel ?

Bialacki:

We consider it symbolic. The Czech president is a legendary personality on world scale. It was the most significant meeting of the Belarusian opposition with a foreign dignitary — and other human rights activists would probably agree with me. Moreover, the Czech Republic is one of the few countries whose parliament has passed a resolution against human rights violations. Czech politicians are really interested in the situation in Belarus; many have visited Belarus. First of all, we discussed with the president the possibility of having our university students, who were suspended for political activities, continue their studies in the Czech Republic. We also agreed on the need for sending observers to this year's presidential elections in Belarus.

DF: Does the regime react to your foreign trips?

Bialacki:

Lukashenka is always haranguing on TV screens, that the opposition intends to sell Belarus to the West. Lately he accused us from receiving millions of dollars from the United States. All this is obviously nonsense.

Viacorka:

Each of our foreign trips means a defeat of the regime in the field of foreign political relations.

By staging alleged dialogue with the opposition, the regime attempted to deceive the West. Fortunately, Europeans did not believe this scenario. Let us remember that the United States, Sweden and Great Britain helped the Polish Solidarity movement much more than continental Europe. We rely on help from all countries of the democratic world.

DF: How strong is the support by the West ?

Viacorka:

There are several European capitals that consequently demonstrate their attitude toward Lukashenka: Stockholm, Prague and London. Here interest in Belarus and support for our independence and democracy is exhibited not only by the responsible foreign ministry officials, but also by parliamentarians and newspapermen. Unprecedented is the position of Washington: in the American political milieu the Belarusian problems became "fashionable". American senators several times supported Belarus' independence, while only eight years ago most western politicians could not find our country on the map. Later we aroused the world's interest by removing nuclear weapons from our territory, Subsequently the world again forgot about us. The upsurge of dictatorship in our country — and primarily the extensive activization of independent democratic forces last year — renewed the attention of the world.

The United Candidate: For and Against

By Maxim Medvedev, a free-lance journalist.

Only a candidate who will be regarded as independent , will have a chance to win. In difficult conditions of the election campaign this person will have to overcome the informational isolation, the severe pressure by the authorities, and to have a maximally clean reputation.

Belarus again arrived at a crucial point of its history. In the coming presidential elections these questions are about to be settled:

Belarus as an independent state — to be or not to be ?
Belarusian language and culture — to exist or not to exist ?
Will the Russian imperialists, using Belarusian authorities devoted to them, be able to deliver to deliver a fatal blow and turn Belarus into one of its deprived provinces ?

Thus the attempts of all healthy forces of Belarusian society — to unite and to find a candidate ready to lead the Belarusian people and change the social and political situation in the country — are quite urgent.

Three names: Semyon Domash, Mikhail Chigir, Vladimir Goncharik

The Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces (CCDF), uniting nearly all NGOs and political organizations of Belarus, after many discussions and long-lasting consultations, reduced the list of potential candidates to three names: Semyon Domash, Mikhail Chigir, Vladimir Goncharik.

Who are they, the potential candidates for the nation's next leader?

SEMYON DOMASH

Born in Lyakhovichi region in 1950.
Married: two sons.
Education: technical and higher economic.
Headed the auto transportation group of enterprises in Grodno,
Former head of the executive committee of the Grodno province.
Deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet.
His idols in politics are: Grand Duke Vitaut the Great, the creator of the strong Belarusian state, respected in all of Europe, and Ronald Reagan who made his people proud of their country, reduced international tensions and created favorable conditions for the development of economy.



Semyon Domash (Domaš)

Domash's political support has both positive and negative sides. He is supported by the voters of democratic Minsk, as well as by the voters of his "patrimony" — the Grodno region and his birthplace region of Baranovichi. Domash also won the sympathy of various NGOs and parties all over the country. Of course, their potential is limited, but proven by their deeds and six years of opposition to Lukashenka. However, the state-owned mass media has endowed them with the stable negative image of "opposition members" and "Popular Front activists."

Being different from Chigir, Semyon Domash does not have any defined image. This is a plus to some extent. However, he is hardly known in Moscow as well. There is doubt whether Kremlin will support such a little-known and therefore dangerous candidate.

One should mention one more thing that is not in Domash's favor. Though Belarus is not formally divided in Western and Eastern parts, the modes of thinking of people inhabiting these regions, differ. The attitude of the population of Brest and Grodno provinces to the political and economic direction of the present regime is quite cautious. On the other hand, people in the eastern regions of the country, much more affected by russification, prefer Belarus to be completely united with Russia, and support Lukashenka. It will be quite complicated for "Western" Domash to win the sympathy of voters from Vitebsk or Mogilev. At first sight Semyon Domash produces an impression of a really careful centrist, though state-controlled mass media are trying to label him as a nationalist and an ultra-right wing politician.

MIKHAIL CHIGIR

Born in 1948 in the Kopyl region.
Married: two children, two grandchildren.
Graduated from the Belarusian Institute of National Economy and finished a special faculty of the Moscow Financial Institute.
Board Chairman of Belagroprombank.
Prime Minister of Belarus in 1994-1996.
His idols in politics and economics are: Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Leszek Balcerowicz.



Mikhail Chigir (Čyhir)

Belarus has been talking about Mikhail Chigir for nearly two years. Some people admire him, others blame him for his alleged mistakes. Some believe the official lies about him, others understand fairly well what are the reasons for finding faults with this man.

The reason is that Chigir, instead of being a devoted servant of the regime, did "the wrong thing" — he demonstratively resigned from the post of prime minister, in protest against Lukashenka's usurpation of power. While many officials create an impression of being silent servants of "the country's owner," Mikhail Chigir returned to politics, served a term in jail for his views, even managed to defend his honor and dignity in court controlled by Lukashenka. The Supreme Court had to acquit Chigir. These are his advantages as a candidate for the president's post.

Belarusians traditionally sympathize with those unjustly punished. Also Mikhail is said to have connections in Moscow, which is a plus in today's conditions. His advantage in internal politics is the fact that the officials at the highest level, including those in security forces, are well-acquainted with him. Chigir is also well-known in the provinces, in the far-off villages, where the election results depend on the position of kolkhoz leaders.

Mikhail Chigir could be a great candidate, but there is one drawback spoiling all his advantages. Torrents of lies

poured on him created a negative image; finally this man was labelled "thief." He has neither the time nor possibility to prove his innocence.

Author's Note: The material was ready for publication when Goncharik decided to run as an independent candidate without the endorsement of the CCDF.

(*Source:* Swedish Website **www.vitryssland.nu,** Febr. 2, 2001)

Pigs Dying of Starvation in a Belarusian Collective Farm

Maria Soderberg, editor of the Website **www.vitryssland.nu**

Excerpts from the text were published in the Swedish newspaper "Dagens Nyheter" on February 21, 2001. The full version of the text is available on ***www.vitryssland.nu.***

In the pig-breeding collective farm "Juzhnoe", located in southern Belarus, at least 25,000 animals have died of starvation since May 2000. Some of the carcasses were butchered and sold to the unsuspecting public. The collective farm workers did not dare to take any preventive steps.

In May 2000 (the workers) were informed that the animals should be fed once every three days. In the beginning some of the workers tried to protest, but the managers did not relent. The collective farm's budget lacked money to buy enough fodder, but the state plan for pigbreeding wasn't to be abolished — so the managers said that "there is only one way out".

"The tractor transporting pig carcasses from the farm, barely managed to keep up with the work. Every day at least 500 carcasses were carried away ", says a female employee, who is close to retirement and therefore prefers to remain anonymous.

For a while a "way out" was found: the carcasses were cooked, and the living pigs were fed the meat. "But around Christmas the gasoline was running low, and this attempt to save most of the pigs failed." The collective farm is located 20 kilometers east of Pinsk and bred around 30,000 pigs before the starvation began. Now there are about 6,000 left.

The starvation of pigs wasn't the only shock for the people in the village of Vulka, where the animal farm is located. When it became clear that the collective farm would not be able to save the animals, the workers offered to buy the starved pigs. It should be noted that every farm worker has the right to buy 6 kilograms of meat every month, at a very low price. But the managers did not allow them to buy live animals; it would interfere with the "production process."

The pig carcasses were heaped into a pit near the collective farm, next to a cornfield. Often were they weren't even covered with earth.

In the summer the village peasants were suddenly offered to buy pork from the collective farm at an extraordinarily low price. When people understood what kind of meat it was, they immediately chased away the hapless sellers.

There are no independent newspapers in the region. Those who try to start one, are denied a publishing license. The fear of the authorities is deeply rooted in people's minds. The most common results of attempts to challenge the regional authorities are: being fired from the only available work place around, loss of retirement pay, and problems for their children in school.

According to women who work on the farm, starvation first affected piglets less than three months old. The piglets naturally survived provided their mothers survived. Since May 2000 the number of pigs reaching the slaughter weight of 90 kilograms, is decreasing constantly.

This year the starvation continues. In farm workers' opinion, it is quite obvious that the meat from the pit keeps disappearing. It is being sold to unsuspecting people, first of all in Pinsk, a city of over 120,000 inhabitants.

BOOK REVIEW

By Art Turevich

Historiker und Herrschaft: Nationsbildung und Geschichtspolitik in Weissrussland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. By Rainer Lindner, Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999. 536 pp. DM 98.00, hard bound.

Published in German, Rainer Lindner's "Historian and the Authorities: Nation Building and Politics of History [Writing] in Belarus in the 19th and 20th Centuries" is an abbreviated version of his 1997 doctoral dissertation at the University of Tübingen. In this book, Lindner tries to establish the relationship between history writing and politics in Belarus under the late tsarist rule, the communist rule and that of Lukashenka's — the role of government to influence the direction of history interpretation.

According to Lindner, with histories of Belarus written by conquerors and other foreign interests, "until the end of the 20th century, state and nation did not come together," and therefore "a genuinely Belarusian historical identity" had trouble to emerge. The job of nation building became extremely difficult when the forces expressing "national aspirations" are limited by the political system under which they have to perform.

Lindner recognizes that Belarusians were long unreceptive to national consciousness-raising and he gives credit to the nationalist historians for trying to raise that consciousness under very difficult circumstances. He accepts the fundamental nationalist view of "genuinely Belarusian historical identity" and that each nation deserves its rightful and distinctive place in history.

Some of Belarus' neighbors, especially Lithuania, do not necessarily agree with this interpretation. Lindner brings this out in his discussion of "Nachbarhistoriographie," in which he includes Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, and "deutschsprachige" historiography. "After the end of World War I, the city [of Vilnius] of course passed to the newly founded Lithuania and was thereby lost as a fulcrum for Belarusan national building."

The book includes five chapters: "Nation Building and National History in Late Tsarist Empire," "The Nation and History under Stalin, 1921-1944," "History Politics between World War and the Thaw, 1944-1954," "Nation Building and History Politicization in Late- and Post-Soviet Period," and "Concluding Remarks."

Lindner's study is quite thorough. The 40-page bibliography is very impressive. It includes Belarusian, Russian, English, Polish, and Ukrainian sources. He had access to extensive Belarusian archives, so the bulk of the study leans on Belarusian historiography

LETTERS

Bush Administration Position on Belarus

Thank you very much for you letter of congratulations and for enclosing a copy of the *Belarusian Review*. The State Department has found the *Belarusian Review* to be a useful reference tool.

Under the new Administration, U.S. policy toward Belarus has not changed. The goal of U.S. policy remains the restoration of democracy in an independent Belarus. Free and fair elections are key to achieving this goal. As you note in your letter, the October 2000 parliamentary elections were neither free nor fair; we continue to recognize the 13th Supreme Soviet as the legitimate Belarusian parliament. With our European allies, we continue to press the Belarusian authorities to create the conditions necessary for the presidential elections planned for this year to be recognized as free and fair by the international community.

The Belarusian people have the right to pick their next president in democratic elections. We support this right and note that only a return to democracy in Belarus can improve relations between the Belarusian authorities and the United States.

Richard L. Armitage
The Deputy Secretary of State
United States Department of State
Wahington, DC, USA

European Union Position on Belarus

Mr. Prodi has well received your letter of 20 January 2000 concerning the situation in Belarus, including a copy of the spring issue of *Belarusian Review*.

The European Union pays great attention to developments in Belarus. We continue to press the Belarusian government to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. In the absence of satisfactory response, we substantially scaled down relations with Belarus since 1997. On the occasion of the 17 October 1999 March of Freedom, the European Union denounced any form of violence in Belarus.

The European Union underlined that the 20 July 1999 marked the end of the first mandate of President Lukashenko, and stressed that the legitimacy of political power could only be achieved by the results of free, democratic and fair elections.

In this respect, the European Union has given full support to the start of a real political dialogue process in Belarus, sponsored by the OSCE, between the authorities, the opposition and the civil society. Such a dialogue is the only peaceful meas to prepare the necessary ground for free and fair elections that the international community can recognise. President Lukashenko has committed himself to this dialogue in signing the Istanbul OSCE Summit Declaration of November 1999. On these grounds, the European Union requested that this dialogue formally starts and brings the wished results.

There is no doubt in that the European Union respects Belarus' independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The European Union has a deep interest in a stable and democratic Belarus, soon to become its direct neighbour.

The European Union will therefore continue to monitor developments carefully and press for peaceful and democratic changes.

Timo Summa
The Director
Directorate Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asian
Republics External Relations Directorate General
European Commission
Brussels, Belgium

Information Provided by BR Appreciated

On behalf of President Vaclav Havel I would like to thank you for your letter dated 20 January 2000 in which you provided information concerning the recent past as well as the current development in Belarus.

Please be assured that President Havel greatly appreciates you taking time in providing the above mentioned information. I would like to take this opportunity to mention that the President is highly interested in the situation of Belarus. As you are aware, in December 2000 he met with the leaders of the Opposition and was then thoroughly informed concerning all occurrences in Belarus.

Pavel Fischer, Director
Political Department
Office of the President
Prague, Czech Republic

* * *

On behalf of the Right Honourable Jean Chretien, I would like to thank you for your correspondence of January 20 regarding the winter 2000 issue of the *Belarusian Review*.

Thank you for providing the Prime Minister with a copy of this material. Your courtesy in bringing this information to his attention is appreciated.

S. Russell
Executive Correspondence Officer
Office of the Prime Minister
Ottawa, Canada

Annual subscription rate for 2001: $45 for individuals, $65 for institutions
Make your check or money order in U.S. funds payable to:
Belarusian Review and mail to: BR, P.O. Box 10353, Torrance, CA 90505, USA

Beginning with summer 1999 (BR 11-2) **annual subscription rates in Europe are:**
1000 Kc in Czech Republic, 45 CHF in Switzerland, 50 DM in Germany, 185 FRF in France
18 GBP in United Kingdom, or EUR 28
Make your check or money order in these currencies payable to:
Spolek SKARYNA (Belarusian Review), Malešická 553/65
108 00 Praha 10, Czech Republic